DC

THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy AND Science Fiction

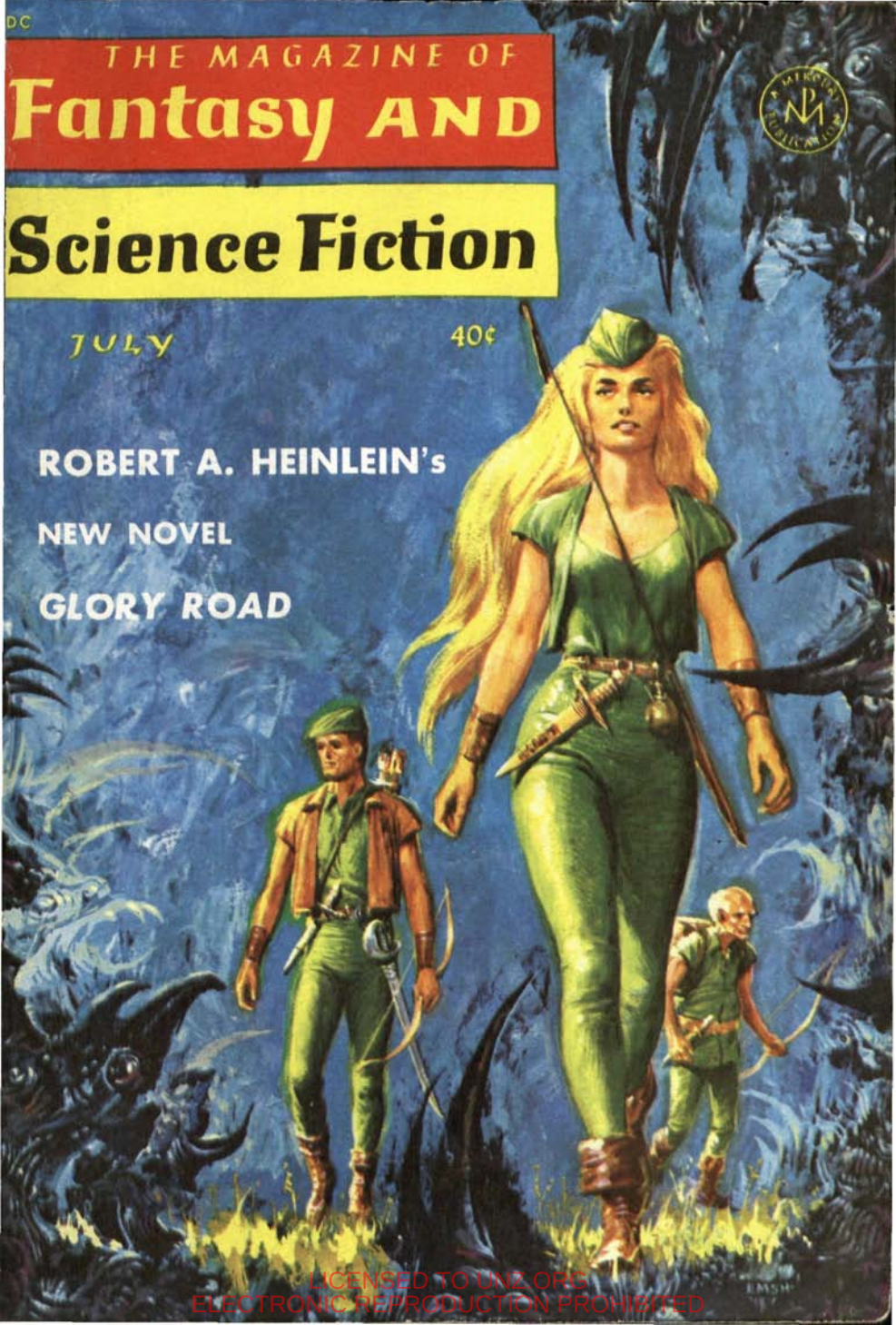
JULY

40¢

ROBERT A. HEINLEIN's

NEW NOVEL

GLORY ROAD



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Fantasy and Science Fiction

JULY *Including Venture Science Fiction*

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Cover by Emsh (illustrating "Glory Road")

Joseph W. Ferman, PUBLISHER *Avram Davidson,* EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Isaac Asimov, SCIENCE EDITOR *Edward L. Ferman,* MANAGING EDITOR

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In this issue . . .

. . . is the first part of the new three-part novel by **ROBERT A. HEINLEIN**—new not only in being fresh-minted, but in bringing you a world new for the conquering: new, Heinlein-thematically, and unlike anything he has ever done before. Prepare now to meet the Horned Ghosts, the Cold Water Gang, the Never-Born who guards the Egg of the Phoenix; to enjoy the curious—but *exceedingly* amiable—hospitality of House Doral; and to enjoy a robust adventure yarn in the grand tradition. **FRITZ LEIBER** is back, too, with a story as beautiful as it is, alas, brief; so is **WILL STANTON**, with a wry, uneasy tale to make you laugh—and wince. **RON GOULART** poses a marriage problem which Ann Landers never had to answer, and newcomer **KENNETH SMITH** displays amazing new talent in a fiction (it is not altogether a story) which seems convincing enough to be fact. *Not* in this issue, for reasons of space only, is F. Feghoot.

Coming soon . . .

. . . is the Letter Page we couldn't find room for in this issue, an article on extra-Terrestrial ecology by **L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP**, and stories by **MACK REYNOLDS, LLOYD BIGGLE, TERRY CARR**, and (for the first time since we became Editor) Your Servant To Command. *Coming Next Month* is a complete short novel by a complete new writer, **RAY NELSON.** Title is «*Turn Off The Sky*» and it is really very different and really very good.

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Introduction to Robert A. Heinlein's GLORY ROAD

The author of this novel suggests that we say about it only, "Here is another Heinlein story for them as likes such." We respectfully decline. More is in order. Robert A. (for Anson) Heinlein is a Missouri-born (1907), Annapolis-educated retired Navy officer and engineer, a champion swordsman, a figure skater, an expert in rifle and pistol, an accomplished cat-midwife, author of over one hundred magazine stories and thirty books. He lives in Colorado Springs with his wife, Virginia (who is a former WAVES officer and chemist and also engineer); their street number is, appropriately, 1776. As we said earlier this year, Robert A. Heinlein is, with Isaac Asimov, one of the two most seminal Science Fiction writers of our time. He contains universes. So instantly coherent, logical, even almost inescapable, have been many of his themes that other writers have, time after time, sown the fields whose sods he was the first to break . . . fields, indeed, which he was the first to perceive. Year after year, decade after decade, he has maintained a position of pre-eminence; his ability to stimulate, to challenge, has remained unabated. Among Heinlein's attitudes and conjectures, his social and political tones have not been the least evocative of comment—"comment," indeed, is perhaps too mild a word for the reaction to some of them—and he says of this new novel, "It will outrage all those who were outraged by STARSHIP SOLDIER [F&SF, Oct.-Nov. 1959], and will upset all those who were upset by STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND [G. P. Putnam's, 1961]; therefore I have great hopes for it . . ." It must not be thought, however, that it was written solely to stir up the alligators. It is not in the least like either of the two other books named, nor, for that matter, like any of his other, earlier, books. Social and political points it makes indeed, a-plenty—but it is also a good, rousing adventure story, and a romance in the ancient as well as in the modern vein. In the days before the lamps went out all over Europe (and, subsequently, Asia and other places as well), James Elroy Flecker could harken back to the Golden Journey on the road to Samarkand. The road to Samarkand, the roads to other places once of high romaunt, are, alas, today too often

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scored with barricades. The urge to travel them has not therebye been diminished in the slightest. Other worlds, other manners . . . and other roads, as well. The Oregon Trail is now clotted with toll-gates, speed-traps, greasy-spoons. The last stagecoach has long since left for Lordsburg. Romance no longer brings up the 9:15 (or whatever train it was which Kipling travelled). But the need, the need is still with us. Let us, then, wrap ourselves in our long-cloaks, buckle on our broadswords, cast a warm glance at the lovely woman—arrow nocked, bow in hand—by our side; and, thus provisioned, prepare to travel

GLORY ROAD

by Robert A. Heinlein

Britannus (shocked):
Caesar, this is not proper.
Theodotus (outraged):
How?
Caesar (recovering his self-possession):
Pardon him, Theodotus: he is a barbarian, and thinks that the customs of his tribe and island are the laws of nature.

CAESAR AND CLEOPATRA, Act II
—George Bernard Shaw

I

I KNOW A PLACE WHERE THERE is no smog and no parking problem and no population explosion . . . no Cold War and no H-bombs and no television commercials . . . no Summit Conferences, no Foreign Aid, no hidden taxes—no income tax. The climate is the sort that Florida and California claim (and neither has), the land is lovely, the people are friendly and hospitable to strangers, the women are beautiful and amazingly anxious to please—

I could go back. I could—

It was an election year with the

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customary theme of anything you can do I can do better, to a background of beeping sputniks. I was twenty-one but couldn't figure out which party to vote against.

Instead I phoned my draft board and told them to send me that notice.

I object to conscription the way a lobster objects to boiling water: it may be his finest hour but it's not his choice. Nevertheless I love my country. Yes, I do, despite propaganda all through school about how patriotism is obsolete. One of my great-grandfathers died at Gettysburg and my father made that long walk back from Inchon Reservoir, so I didn't buy this new idea. I argued against it in class—until it got me a "D" in Social Studies, then I shut up and passed the course.

But I didn't change my opinions to match those of a teacher who didn't know Little Round Top from Seminary Ridge.

Are you of my generation? If not, do you know *why* we turned out so wrong-headed? Or did you just write us off as "juvenile delinquents"?

I could write a book. Brother! But I'll note one key fact: After you've spent years and years trying to knock the patriotism out of a boy don't expect him to cheer when he gets a notice reading: "Greeting: You are hereby ordered for induction into the Armed Forces of the United States—"

Talk about a "Lost Generation"! I've read that post-World-War-One jazz—Fitzgerald and Hemingway and so on—and it strikes me that all they had to worry about was wood alcohol in bootleg liquor. They had the world by the tail—so why were they crying?

Sure, they had Hitler and the Depression ahead of them. But they didn't know that. *We* had Khrushchev and the H-bomb and we certainly did know.

But we were not a "Lost Generation." We were worse; we were the "Safe Generation." Not beatniks. The Beats were never more than a few hundred out of millions. Oh, we talked beatnik jive and dug cool sounds in stereo and disagreed with *Playboy's* poll of jazz musicians just as earnestly as if it mattered. We read Salinger and Kerouac and used language that shocked our parents and dressed (sometimes) in beatnik fashion. but we didn't think that bongo drums and a beard compared with money in the bank. We weren't rebels. We were as conformist as army worms. "Security" was our unspoken watchword.

Most of our watchwords were unspoken but we followed them as compulsively as a baby duck takes to water. "Don't fight City Hall." "Get it while the getting is good." "Don't get caught." High goals, these, great moral values, and they all mean "Security." "Going steady" (my generation's con-

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tribution to the American Dream) was based on security; it insured that Saturday night could never be the loneliest night for the weak. If you went steady, competition was eliminated.

But we had ambitions. Yes, sir! Stall off your draft board and get through college. Get married and get her pregnant, with both families helping you to stay on as a draft-immune student. Line up a job well thought of by draft boards, say with some missle firm. Better yet, take postgraduate work if your folks (or hers) could afford it and have another kid and get safely beyond the draft—besides, a doctor's degree was as good as a union card.

Short of a pregnant wife with well-to-do parents the greatest security lay in being 4-F. Punctured eardrums were good but an allergy was best. One of my neighbors had a terrible asthma that lasted till his twenty-sixth birthday. No fake—he was allergic to draft boards. Another escape was to convince an army psychiatrist that your interests were more suited to the State Department than to the Army. More than half of my generation were "unfit for military service."

I don't find this surprising. There is an old picture of people traveling by sleigh through deep woods—pursued by wolves. Every now and then they grab one of their number and toss him to the wolves. That's conscription even if you call it "selective service" and pretty it up with USOs and "veterans' benefits"—it's tossing a minority to the wolves while the rest go on with that single-minded pursuit of the three-car garage, the swimming pool, and the safe & secure retirement.

I am not being holier-than-thou; I was after that same three-car garage myself.

However, my folks could not put me through college. My stepfather was an Air Force warrant officer with all he could handle to buy shoes for his own kids. When he was transferred to Germany just before my high school senior year and I was invited to move in with my father's sister and her husband, both of us were relieved.

I was no better off financially as my uncle-in-law was supporting a first wife—under California law much like being an Alabama field hand before the Civil War. But I had $35/month as a "surviving dependent of a deceased veteran." (Not "war orphan," which is another deal that pays more.) My mother was certain that Dad's death had resulted from wounds but the Veterans Administration thought differently, so I was just a "surviving dependent."

$35 a month did not fill the hole I put in their groceries and it was understood that when I graduated I would root for myself.

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By doing my military time, no doubt—But I had my own plan; I played football and finished senior year season with the California Central Valley secondary school record for yards gained and a broken nose—started in at the local State College the next fall with a job "sweeping the gym" at $10 more a month than that pension, plus fees.

I couldn't see the end but my plan was clear: Hang on, teeth and toenails, and get an engineering degree. Avoid the draft and marriage. On graduation get a deferred-status job. Save money and pick up a law degree, *too*—because in Homestead, Florida, a teacher had pointed out that, while engineers made money, the big money and boss jobs went to lawyers. So I was going to beat the game, yes, sir! Be a Horatio Alger hero. I would have headed straight for that law degree but for the fact that the college did not offer law.

At the end of the season my sophomore year they de-emphasized football.

We had had a perfect season—no wins. "Flash" Gordon (that's me—in the sports write-ups) stood one in yardage and points; nevertheless Coach and I were out of jobs. Oh, I "swept the gym" the rest of that year on basketball, fencing, and track, but the alumnus who picked up the tab wasn't interested in a basketball player who was only six feet one. I spent that summer pushing an idiot stick and trying to line up a deal elsewhere. I turned twenty-one that summer, which chopped that $35/month, too. Shortly after Labor Day I fell back on a previously prepared position, i.e., I made that phone call to my draft board.

I had in mind a year in the Air Force, then win a competitive appointment to the Air Force Academy—be an astronaut and famous, instead of rich.

Well, we can't all be astronauts. The Air Force had its quota or something. I was in the Army so fast I hardly had time to pack.

So I set out to be the best chaplain's clerk in the Army; I made sure that "typing" was listed as one of my skills. If I had anything to say about it, I was going to do my time at Fort Carson, typing neat copies while going to night school.

I didn't have anything to say about it.

Ever been in Southeast Asia? It makes Florida look like a desert. Wherever you step it *squishes*. Instead of tractors they use water buffaloes. The bushes are filled with insects and natives who shoot at you. It wasn't a war—not even a "Police Action." We were "Military Advisers." But a Military Adviser who has been dead four days in that heat smells the same way a corpse does in a real war.

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I was promoted to corporal. I was promoted seven times. To corporal.

I didn't have the right attitude. So my company commander said. My Daddy had been a Marine and my stepfather was Air Force; my only Army ambition had been to be a chaplain's clerk Stateside. I didn't like the Army. My company commander didn't like the Army either; he was a first lieutenant who hadn't made captain and every time he got to brooding Corporal Gordon lost his stripes.

I lost them the last time for telling him that I was writing to my Congressman to find out why I was the only man in Southeast Asia who was going to be retired for old age instead of going home when his time was up—and that made him so mad he not only busted me but went out and was a hero, and then he was dead. And that's how I got this scar across my broken nose because I was a hero, too, and should have received the Medal of Honor, only nobody was looking.

While I was recovering, they decided to send me home.

Major Ian Hay, back in the "War to End War", described the structure of military organizations: Regardless of T.O., all military bureaucracies consist of a Surprise Party Department, a Practical Joke Department, and a Fairy Godmother Department. The first two process most matters as the third is very small; the Fairy Godmother Department is one elderly female GS-5 clerk usually out on sick leave.

But when she is at her desk, she sometimes puts down her knitting and picks a name passing across her desk and does something nice. You have seen how I was whipsawed by the Surprise Party and Practical Joke Departments; this time the Fairy Godmother Department picked PFC Gordon.

Like this— When I knew that I was going home as soon as my face healed (little brown brother hadn't sterilized his bolo), I put in a request to be discharged in Wiesbaden, where my family was, rather than California, home of record. I am not criticizing little brown brother; he hadn't intended me to heal at all—and he would have managed it if he hadn't been killing my company commander and too hurried to do a good job on me. I hadn't sterilized my bayonet but he didn't complain, he just sighed and came apart, like a doll with its sawdust cut. I felt grateful to him; he not only had rigged the dice so that I got out of the Army, he also gave me a great idea.

He and the ward surgeon— The Surgeon had said, "You're going to get well, son. But you'll be scarred like a Heidelberg student."

Which got me thinking— You couldn't get a decent job without a degree, any more than you could be a plasterer without being a son

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or nephew of somebody in the plasterers' union. But there are degrees and degrees. Sir Isaac Newton, with a degree from a cow college such as mine, would wash bottles for Joe Thumbfingers—if Joe had a degree from a European university.

Why not Heidelberg? I intended to milk my G.I. benefits; I had that in mind when I put in that too-hasty call to my draft board.

According to my mother everything was cheaper in Germany. Maybe I could stretch those benefits into a doctor's degree. Herr Doktor Gordon, mit scars on der face from Heidelberg yet!—that would rate an extra $3000 a year from any missile firm.

Hell, I would fight a couple of student duels and add real Heidelberg scars to back up the dandy I had. Fencing was a sport I really enjoyed (though the one that counted least toward "sweeping the gym"). Some people cannot stand knives, swords, bayonets, anything sharp; psychiatrists have a word for it: aichmophobia. Idiots who drive cars a hundred miles an hour on fifty-mile-an-hour roads will nevertheless panic at the sight of a bare blade.

I've never been bothered that way and that's why I'm alive and one reason why I kept being bucked back to corporal. A "Military Adviser" can't afford to be afraid of knives, bayonets, and such; he must cope with them. I've never been afraid of them because I'm always sure I can do unto another what he is planning to do unto me.

I've always been right, except that time I made the mistake of being a hero, and that wasn't too bad a mistake. If I had tried to bug out instead of staying to disembowel him, he would have chopped my spine in two. As it was, he never got a proper swing at me; his jungle cutter just slashed my face as he came apart—leaving me with a nasty wound that was infected long before the helicopters came. But I never felt it. Presently I got dizzy and sat down in the mud and when I woke up a medic was giving me plasma.

I rather looked forward to trying a Heidelberg duel. They pad your body and arm and neck and put a steel guard on your eyes and nose and across your ears—this is not like encountering a pragmatic Marxist in the jungle. I once handled one of those swords they use in Heidelberg; it was a light, straight saber, sharp on the edge, sharp a few inches on the back—but a *blunt* point! A toy, suited only to make pretty scars for girls to admire.

I got a map and whaddayuh know!—Heidelberg is just down the road from Wiesbaden. So I requested my discharge in Wiesbaden.

The ward surgeon said, "You're an optimist, son," but initialed it.

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The medical sergeant in charge of paperwork said, "Out of the Question, Soldier." I won't say money changed hands but the endorsement the hospital's C.O. signed read, "Forwarded." The ward agreed that I was bucking for a psycho; Uncle Sugar does not give free trips around the world to PFCs.

I was already so far around that I was as close to Hoboken as to San Francisco—and closer to Wiesbaden. However policy called for shipping returnees back via the Pacific. Military policy is like cancer: Nobody knows where it comes from but it can't be ignored.

The Fairy Godmother Department woke up and touched me with its wand.

I was about to climb aboard a bucket called the *General Jones* bound for Manila, Taipei, Yokohama, Pearl, and Seattle when a dispatch came granting my every whim and then some. I was ordered to HQ USAREUR, Heidelberg, Germany, by available military transportation, for discharge, at own request see reference foxtrot. Accumulated leave could be taken or paid, see reference bravo. Subject man was authorized to return to Zone Interior (the States) any time within twelve months of separation, via available military transportation at no further expense to the government. Unquote.

The paperwork sergeant called me in and showed me this, his face glowing with innocent glee. "Only there ain't no 'available transportation,' Soldier—so haul ass aboard the 'General Jones.' You're going to Seattle."

I knew what he meant: The only transport going west in a long, long time had sailed for Singapore thirty-six hours earlier. I stared at that dispatch, thinking about boiling oil and wondering if he had held it back just long enough to keep me from sailing under it.

I shook my head. "I'm going to catch the 'General Smith' in Singapore. Be a real human type, Sarge, and cut me a set of orders for it."

"Your orders are cut. For the 'Jones.' For Seattle."

"Gosh," I said thoughtfully. "I guess I had better go cry on the Chaplain." I faded out fast but didn't see the Chaplain; I went to the air field. It took five minutes to find that no commercial nor U.S. military flight was headed for Singapore in time to do me any good.

But there was an Australian military transport headed for Singapore that night. Aussies weren't even "military advisers" but often were around, as "military observers." I found the plane's skipper, a flight leftenant, and put the situation to him. He grinned and said, "Always room for one more bloke. Wheels up shortly after tea, likely. If the old girl will fly."

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I knew it would fly; it was a Gooney Bird, a C-47, mostly patches and God knows how many millions of miles. It would get to Singapore on one engine if asked. I knew my luck was in as soon as I saw that grand old collection of masking tape and glue sitting on the field.

Four hours later I was in her and wheels up.

I checked in aboard USMTS *General Smith* the next morning, rather wet—the *Pride of Tasmania* had flown through storms the night before and a Gooney Bird's one weakness is that they leak. But who minds clean rain after jungle mud? The ship was sailing that evening which was grand news.

Singapore is like Hong Kong only flat; one afternoon was enough. I had a drink in the old Raffles, another in the Adelphi, got rained on in the Great World amusement park, walked through Change Alley with a hand on my money and the other on my orders —and bought an Irish Sweepstake's ticket.

I don't gamble, if you will concede that poker is a game of skill. However this was a tribute to the goddess of fortune, thanks for a long run of luck. If she chose to answer with $140,000 US, I wouldn't throw it in her face. If she didn't . . . well, the ticket's face value was one pound, $2.80 US; I paid $9.00 Singapore, or $3.00 US—a small gesture from a man who had just won a free trip around the world—not to mention coming out of the jungle still breathing.

But I got my three dollars' worth at once, as I fled out of Change Alley to avoid two dozen other walking banks anxious to sell me more tickets, Singapore dollars, any sort of money—or my hat if I let go of it—reached the street, hailed a cab, and told the driver to take me to the boat landing. This was a victory of spirit over flesh because I had been debating whether to snatch the chance to ease enormous biological back pressure. Good old Scarface Gordon had been an Eagle Scout awfully long and Singapore is one of the Seven Sinful Cities where *anything* may be had.

I am not implying that I had remained faithful to the Girl Next Door. The young lady back home who had taught me most about the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, with an amazing send-off the night before I was inducted, had "Dear-Johnned" me in basic training; I felt gratitude but no loyalty. She got married soon after, now has two children, neither of them mine.

The real cause of my biological unease was geographical. Those little brown brothers I had been fighting, with and against, all had little brown sisters, many of whom

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could be had for a price, or even pour l'amour ou pour le sport.

But that had been all the local talent for a long time. Nurses? Nurses are officers—and the rare USO entertainer who got that far from Stateside was even more thoroughly blocked off than were nurses.

I did not object to little brown sisters because they were brown. I was as brown as they were, in my face, except for a long pink scar. I drew the line because they were *little*.

I was a hundred and ninety pounds of muscle and no fat, and I could never convince myself that a female four feet ten inches tall and weighing less than ninety pounds and looking twelve years old is in fact a freely consenting adult. To me it felt like a grim sort of statutory rape and produced psychic impotence.

Singapore looked like the place to find a big girl. But when I escaped from Change Alley, I suddenly didn't like people, big or little, male or female, and headed for the ship—and probably saved myself from pox, Cupid's catarrh, soft chancre, Chinese rot, salt water itch, and athlete's foot—the wisest decision I had made since, at fourteen, I had declined to wrestle a medium-sized alligator.

I told the driver in English what landing I wanted, repeated it in memorized Cantonese (not too well; it's a nine-toned language, and French and German are all I had in school), and showed him a map with the landing marked and its name printed in English and drawn in Chinese.

Everybody who left the ship was given one of these maps. In Asia every cab driver speaks enough English to take you to the Red Light district and to shops where you buy "bargains." But he is never able to find your dock or boat landing.

My cabbie listened, glanced at the map, and said, "Okay, Mac. I dig it," and took off and rounded a corner with tires squealing while shouting at peddle cabs, coolies, children, dogs. I relaxed, happy at having found this cabbie among thousands.

Suddenly I sat up and shouted for him to stop.

I must explain something: I can't get lost.

Call it a "psi" talent, like that stuff they study at Duke. Mother used to say that sonny had a "bump of direction." Call it what you will, I was six or seven before I realized that other people *could* get lost. I always know which way is north, the direction of the point where I started and how far away it is. I can head straight back or retrace my steps, even in dark and jungle. This was the main reason why I was always promoted back to corporal and usually shoved into a sergeant's job. Patrols I headed always came back—the

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survivors, I mean. This is comforting to city boys who didn't want to be in that jungle anyhow.

I had shouted because the driver had swung right when he should have swung left and was about to cut back across his own track.

He speeded up.

I yelled again. He no longer dug English.

It was another mile and several turns later when he had to stop because of a traffic jam. I got out and he jumped out and started screaming in Cantonese and pointing at the meter in his cab. We were surrounded by Chinese adding to the din and smaller ones plucking at my clothes. I kept my hand on my money and was happy indeed to spot a cop. I yelled and caught his eye.

He came through the crowd brandishing a long staff. He was a Hindu; I said to him, "Do you speak English?"

"Certainly. And I understand American." I explained my trouble, showed him the map, and said that the driver had picked me up at Change Alley and had been driving in circles.

The cop nodded and talked with the driver in a third language—Malayan, I suppose. At last the cop said, "He doesn't understand English. He thought you said to drive to Johore."

The bridge to Johore is as far as you can get from the anchorage and still be on the Island of Singapore. I said angrily, "The hell he doesn't understand English!"

The cop shrugged. "You hired him, you must pay what is on the taximeter. Then I will explain to him where you wish to go and arrange a fixed fee."

"I'll see him in hell first!"

"That is possible. The distance is quite short—in this neighborhood. I suggest that you pay. The waiting time is quickly mounting up."

There comes a time when a man must stand up for his rights, or he can't bear to look at himself in a mirror to shave. I had already shaved, so I paid—$18.50 Sing., for wasting an hour and ending up farther from the landing. The driver wanted a tip but the cop shut him up and then let me walk with him.

Using both hands I hung onto my orders and money, and the Sweepstake's ticket folded in with the money. But my pen disappeared and cigarettes and handkerchief and a Ronson lighter. When I felt ghost fingers at the strap of my watch, I agreed to the cop's suggestion that he had a cousin, an honest man, who would drive me to my landing for a fixed —and moderate—fee.

The "cousin" turned out to be just coming down the street; half an hour later I was aboard ship. I shall never forget Singapore, a most educational city.

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II

TWO MONTHS LATER I WAS ON the French Riviera. The Fairy God mother Department watched over me across the Indian Ocean, up the Red Sea, and clear to Napoli. I lived a healthy life, exercising and getting tan every morning, sleeping afternoons, playing poker at night. There are many people who do not know the odds (poor, but computable) for improving a poker hand in the draw, but are anxious to learn. When we got to Italy I had a beautiful tan and a sizable nest egg.

Early in the voyage someone went broke and wanted to put a Sweepstake's ticket into the game. After some argument Sweepstake's tickets were made valuta at a discount, $2.00 USA per ticket. I finished the trip with fifty-three tickets.

Hitching a flight from Napoli to Frankfurt took only hours. Then the Fairy Godmother Department handed me back to the Surprise Party and Practical Joke Departments.

Before going to Heidelberg I ducked over to Wiesbaden to see my mother, my stepfather and the kids—

—and found that they had just left for the States, on their way to Elmendorf AFB in Alaska.

So I went to Heidelberg to be processed, and looked the town over while the red tape unwound.

Lovely town— Handsome castle, good beer, and *big* girls with rosy cheeks and shapes like Coca-Cola bottles— Yes, this looked like a nice place to get a degree. I started inquiring into rooms and such, and met a young kraut wearing a studenten cap and some face scars as ugly as mine—things were looking up.

I discussed my plans with the first sergeant of the transient company.

He shook his head. "Oh, you poor boy!"

Why? No G.I. benefits for Gordon—I wasn't a "veteran."

Never mind that scar. Never mind that I had killed more men in combat than you could crowd into a—well, never mind. That thing was not a "war" and Congress had not passed a bill providing educational benefits for us "Military Advisers."

I suppose this was my own fault. All my life there had been "G.I. benefits"—why, I had shared a bench in chem lab with a veteran who was going to school on the G.I. bill.

This fatherly sergeant said, "Don't take it hard, son. Go home, get a job, wait a year. They'll pass it and date it back, almost certainly. You're young."

So here I was on the Riviera, a civilian, enjoying a taste of Europe before using that transportation home. Heidelberg was out of the question. Oh, the pay I hadn't

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been able to spend in the jungle, plus accumulated leave, plus my winnings at poker, added up to a sum which would have kept me a year in Heidelberg. But it would never stretch enough for a degree. I had been counting on that mythical "G.I. Bill" for eating money and on my cash as a cushion.

My (revised) plan was obvious. Grab that trip home before my year was up—grab it before school opened. Use the cash I had to pay board to Aunt and Uncle, work next summer and see what turned up. With the draft no longer hanging over me I could find some way to sweat out that last year even if I couldn't be "Herr Doktor Gordon."

However, school didn't open until fall and here it was spring. I was damn well going to see a little of Europe before I applied nose to grindstone; another such chance might never come.

There was another reason for waiting: those Sweepstake tickets. The drawing for horses was coming up.

The Irish Sweepstake starts as a lottery. First they sell enough tickets to paper Grand Central Station. The Irish hospitals get 25% and are the only sure winners. Shortly before the race they draw for horses. Let's say twenty horses are entered. If your ticket fails to draw a horse, it's waste paper. (Oh, there are minor consolation prizes.)

But if you do draw a horse, you still haven't won. Some horses won't start. Of those that do, most of them chase the other horses. However, any ticket that draws any horse at all, even a goat that can barely walk to the paddock, that ticket suddenly acquires a value of thousands of dollars between the drawing and the race. Just how much depends on how good the horse is. But prizes are high and the worst horse in the field has been known to win.

I had fifty-three tickets. If one of them drew a horse, I could sell that ticket for enough to put me through Heidelberg. So I stayed and waited for the drawing.

Europe needn't be expensive. A youth hostel is luxury to a man who has come out of the boondocks of Southeast Asia and even the French Riviera isn't expensive if you approach it from underneath. I didn't stay on La Promenade des Anglais; I had a tiny room four floors up and two kilometres back, and the shared use of some plumbing. There are wonderful night clubs in Nice but you need not patronize them as the floor show at the beaches is as good . . . and free. I never appreciated what a high art the fan dance can be until the first time I watched a French girl get out of her clothes and into her bikini in plain sight of citizens, tourists, gendarmes, dogs—and me—all without quite violating the lenient French mores

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concerning "indecent exposure." Or only momentarily.

Yes, sir, there are things to see and do on the French Riviera without spending money.

The beaches are terrible. Rocks. But rocks are better than jungle mud and I put on trunks and enjoyed the floor show and added to my tan. It was spring, before the tourist season and not crowded, but it was warm and summery and dry. I lay in the sun and was happy and my only luxury was a deposit box with American Express and the Paris edition of the N.Y. *Herald-Tribune* and *The Stars & Stripes*. These I would glance over to see how the Powers-that-be were mismanaging the world, then look for what was new in the unWar I had just been let out of (usually no mention, although we had been told that we were "saving civilization"), then get down to important matters, i.e., news of the Irish Sweepstake, plus the possibility that *The Stars & Stripes* might announce that it had all been a hideous dream and I was entitled to educational benefits after all.

Then came crossward puzzles and "Personal" ads. I always read "Personals;" they are a naked look into private lives. Things like: "M.L. phone R.S. before noon. Money." Makes you wonder who did what to whom, and who got paid?

Presently I found a still cheaper way to live with an even better floor show. Have you heard of l'Île du Levant? It as an island off the Riviera between Marseilles and Nice, and is much like Catalina. It has a village at one end and the French Navy has blocked off the other for guided missiles; the rest of it is hills and beaches and grottoes. There are no automobiles, nor even bicycles. The people who go there don't want to be reminded of the outside world.

For ten dollars a day you can enjoy luxury equal to forty dollars a day in Nice. Or you can pay five cents a day for camping and live on a dollar a day—which I did—and there are good cheap restaurants anytime you get tired of cooking.

It is a place that seems to have no rules of any sort. Wait a minute; there is one. Outside the village, Heliopolis, is a sign: "Le Nu Integral Est Formellement INTERDIT." ("Complete nakedness is strictly forbidden.")

This means that everyone, man or woman, must put on a little triangle of cloth, a cache-sexe, a G-string, before going inside the village.

Elsewhere, on beaches and in camping grounds and around the island, you don't have to wear a damned thing and nobody does.

Save for the absence of automobiles and clothes, the Isle of the Levant is like any other bit of back-country France. There is a

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shortage of fresh water, but the French don't drink water and you bathe in the Mediterranean and for a franc you can buy enough fresh water for half a dozen sponge baths to rinse off the salt. Take the train from Nice or Marseilles, get off at Toulon and take a bus to Lavandou, then by boat (an hour and a few minutes) to l'Île du Levant—then chuck away your cares with your clothes.

I found I could buy the Herald-Trib, a day old, in the village, at the same place ("Au Minimum," Mme. Alexandre) where I rented a tent and camping gear. I bought groceries at La Brise Marine and camped above La Plage des Grottes, close to the village, and settled down and let my nerves relax while I enjoyed the floor show.

Some people disparage the female form divine. Sex is too good for them; they should have been oysters. All gals are good to look at (including little brown sisters even though they scared me); the only difference is that some look better than others. Some were fat and some were skinny and some were old and some were young. Some looked as if they had stepped straight out of Les Folies Bergères. I got acquainted with one of those and I wasn't far off; she was a Swedish girl who was a "nue" in another Paris revue. She practiced English on me and I practiced French on her, and she promised to cook me a Swedish dinner if I was ever in Stockholm and I cooked her a dinner over an alcohol lamp and we got giggly on vin ordinaire, and she wanted to know how I had acquired my scar and I told some lies. Marjatta was good for an old soldier's nerves and I was sad when she had to leave.

But the floor show went on. Three days later I was sitting on Grotto Beach, leaning against a rock and working the crossword puzzle, when suddenly I got cross-eyed trying not to stare at the most stare-able woman I have ever seen in my life.

Woman, girl—I couldn't be sure. At first glance I thought she was eighteen, maybe twenty; later when I was able to look her square in her face she still looked eighteen but could have been forty. Or a hundred and forty. She had the agelessness of perfect beauty. Like Helen of Troy, or Cleopatra. It seemed possible that she was Helen of Troy but I knew she wasn't Cleopatra because she was not a redhead; she was a natural blonde. She was a tawny toast color all over without a hint of bikini marks and her hair was the same shade two tones lighter. It flowed, unconfined, in graceful waves down her back and seemed never to have been cut.

She was tall, not much shorter than I am, and not too much lighter in weight. Not fat, not fat at all save for that graceful padding that smooths the feminine form, shad-

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ing the muscles underneath—I was sure there were muscles underneath; she carried herself with the relaxed power of a lioness.

Her shoulders were broad for a woman, as broad as her very female hips; her waist might have seemed thick on a lesser woman, on her it was deliciously slender. Her belly did not sag at all but carried the lovely doubly-domed curve of perfect muscle tone. Her breasts—only her big rib cage could carry such large ones without appearing too much of a good thing. They jutted firmly out and moved only a trifle when she moved, and they were crowned with rosy brown confections that were frankly nipples, womanly and not virginal.

Her navel was that jewel the Persian poets praised.

Her legs were long for her height; her hands and feet were not small but were slender, graceful. She was graceful in all ways; it was impossible to think of her in a pose ungraceful. Yet she was so lithe and limber that, like a cat, she could have twisted herself into any position.

Her face— How do you describe perfect beauty except to say that when you see it you can't mistake it? Her lips were full and her mouth rather wide. It was faintly curved in the ghost of a smile even when her features were at rest. Her lips were red but if she was wearing makeup of any sort it had been applied so skillfully that I could not detect it—and that alone would have made her stand out, for that was a year all other females were wearing "Continental" makeup, as artificial as a corset and as bold as a doxy's smile.

Her nose was straight and large enough for her face, no button. Her eyes—

She caught me staring at her. Certainly, women expect to be looked at and expect it unclothed quite as much as when dressed for the ball. But it is rude to stare openly. I had given up the fight in the first ten seconds and was trying to memorize her, every line, every curve.

Her eyes locked with mine and she stared back and I began to blush but couldn't look away. Her eyes were so deep a blue that they were dark, darker than my own brown eyes.

I said huskily, "Pardonnez-moi, ma'm'selle," and managed to tear my eyes away.

She answered, in English, "Oh, I don't mind. Look all you please," and looked me up and down as carefully as I had inspected her. Her voice was a warm, full contralto, surprisingly deep in its lowest register.

She took two steps toward me and almost stood over me. I started to get up and she motioned me to stay seated, with a gesture that assumed obedience as if she were

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very used to giving orders. "Rest where you are," she said. The breeze carried her fragrance to me and I got goose flesh all over. "You are American."

"Yes." I was certain she was not, yet I was equally certain she was not French. Not only did she have no trace of French accent but also —well, French women are at least slightly provocative at all times; they can't help it, it's ingrained in the French culture. There was nothing provocative about this woman—except that she was an incitement to riot just by existing.

But, without being provocative, she had that rare gift for immediate intimacy; she spoke to me as a very old friend might speak, friends who knew each other's smallest foibles and were utterly easy tete-à-tete. She asked me questions about myself, some of them quite personal, and I answered all of them, honestly, and it never occurred to me that she had no right to quiz me. She never asked my name, nor I hers—nor any question of her.

At last she stopped and looked me over again, carefully and soberly. Then she said thoughtfully, "You are very beautiful," and added, "Au 'voir"—turned and walked down the beach into the water and swam away.

I was too stunned to move. Nobody had ever called me "handsome" even before I broke my nose. As for "beautiful"!

But I don't think it would have done me any good to have chased her, even if I had thought of it in time. That gal could swim.

III

I STAYED AT THE PLAGE UNTIL sundown, waiting for her to come back. Then I made a hurried supper of bread and cheese and wine, got dressed in my G-string and walked into town. There I prowled bars and restaurants and did not find her, meanwhile windowpeeping into cottages wherever shades were not drawn. When the bistros started shutting down, I gave up, went back to my tent, cursed myself for eight kinds of fool—(why couldn't I have said, "What's your name and where do you live and couldn't I have said, "What's your name and where do you live and where are you staying *here?*")—sacked in and went to sleep.

I was up at dawn and checked the plage, ate breakfast, checked the plage again, got "dressed" and went into the village, checked the shops and post office, and bought my Herald-Trib.

Then I was faced with one of the most difficult decisions of my life: I had drawn a horse.

I wasn't certain at first, as I did not have those fifty-three serial numbers memorized. I had to run back to my tent, dig out a memorandum and check—and I had! It

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was a number that had stuck in mind because of its pattern: #XDY 34555. I had a horse!

Which meant several thousand dollars, just how much I didn't know. But enough to put me through Heidelberg . . . *if* I cashed in on it at once. The Herald-Trib was always a day late there, which meant the drawing had taken place at least two days earlier—and in the meantime that dog could break a leg or be scratched nine other ways. My ticket was important money only as long as "Lucky Star" was listed as a starter.

I had to get to Nice in a hurry and find out where and how you got the best price for a lucky ticket. Dig the ticket out of my deposit box and sell it!

But how about "Helen of Troy?"

Shylock with his soul-torn cry of "Oh, my daughter! Oh, my ducats!" was no more split than I.

I compromised. I wrote a painful note, identifying myself, telling her that I had been suddenly called away and pleading with her either to wait unitl I returned tomorrow, or at the very least, to leave a note telling me how to find her. I left it with the post mistress along with a description—blonde, so tall, hair this long, magnificent poitrine—and twenty francs with a promise of twice that much if she delivered it and got an answer. The post mistress said that she had never seen her but if cette grande blonde ever set foot in the village the note would be delivered.

That left me just time to rush back, dress in off-island clothes, dump my gear with Mme. Alexandre, and catch the boat. Then I had three hours of travel time to worry through.

The trouble was that Lucky Star wasn't really a dog. My horse rated no farther down than fifth or sixth, no matter who was figuring form. So? Stop while I was ahead and take my profit?

Or go for broke?

It wasn't easy. Let's suppose I could sell the ticket for $10,000. Even if I didn't try any fancy footwork on taxes, I would still keep most of it and get through school.

But I was going to get through school anyway—and did I really want to go to Heidelberg? That student with the dueling scars had been a slob, with his phony pride in scars from fake danger.

Suppose I hung on and grabbed the big one, £50,000, or $140,000—

Do you know how much tax a bachelor pays on $140,000 in the Land of the Brave and the Home of the Fee?

$103,000, that's what he pays.

That leaves him $37,000.

Did I want to bet about $10,000 against the chance of winning $37,000—with the odds at least 15 to 1 against me?

Brother, that is drawing to an

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inside straight. The principle is the same whether it's 37 grand, or jacks-or-better with a two-bit limit.

But suppose I wangled some way to beat the tax, thus betting $10,000 to win $140,000? That made the potential profit match the odds—And $140,000 was not just eating money for college but a fortune that could bring in four or five thousand a year forever.

I wouldn't be "cheating" Uncle Sugar; the USA had no more moral claim on that money (if I won) than I had on the Holy Roman Empire. What had Uncle Sugar done for *me*? He had clobbered my father's life for two wars, one of which we weren't allowed to win —and thereby made it tough for me to get through college quite aside from what a father may be worth in spiritual intangibles to his son (I didn't know, I never would know!)—then he had grabbed me out of college and had sent me to fight another unWar and damned near killed me and lost me my sweet girlish laughter.

So how is Uncle Sugar entitled to clip $103,000 and leave me the short end? So he can "lend" it to Poland? Or give it to Brazil? Oh, my back!

There was a way to keep it all (if I won) legal as marriage. Go live in little old tax-free Monaco for a year. Then take it anywhere.

New Zealand, maybe. The Herald-Trib had had the usual headlines, only more so. It looked as if the boys (just big playful boys!) who run this planet were about to hold that major war, the one with ICBM's and H-bombs, any time now.

If a man went as far south as New Zealand there might be something left after the fallout fell out.

New Zealand is supposed to be very pretty and they say that a fisherman there regards a five-pound trout as too small to take home.

I had caught a two-pound trout once.

About then I made a horrible discovery. I didn't want to go back to school, win, lose, or draw. I no longer gave a damn about three-car garages and swimming pools, nor any other status symbol or "security." There was *no* security in this world and only damn fools and mice thought there could be.

Somewhere back in the jungle I had shucked off all ambition of that sort. I had been shot at too many times and had lost interest in supermarkets and exurban subdivisions and tonight is the PTA supper don't forget dear you promised.

Oh, I wasn't about to hole up in a monastery. I still wanted—

What *did* I want?

I wanted a Roc's egg. I wanted a harem loaded with lovely odalisques less than the dust beneath my chariot wheels, the rust that never stained my sword. I wanted raw red gold in nuggets the size of your fist and feed that lousy claim jumper to the huskies! I wanted to

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get up feeling brisk and go out and break some lances, than pick a likely wench for my droit du seigneur—I wanted to stand up to the Baron and *dare* him to touch my wench! I wanted to hear the purple water chuckling against the skin of the *Nancy Lee* in the cool of the morning watch and not another sound, nor any movement save the slow tilting of the wings of the albatross that had been pacing us the last thousand miles.

I wanted the hurtling moons of Barsoom. I wanted Storisende and Poictesme and Holmes shaking me awake to tell me, "The game's afoot!" I wanted to float down the Mississippi on a raft and elude a mob in company with the Duke of Bilgewater and the Lost Dauphin.

I wanted Prester John, and Excalibur held by a moonwhite arm out of a silent lake. I wanted to sail with Ulysses and with Tros of Samothrace and eat the lotus in a land that seemed always afternoon. I wanted the feeling of romance and the sense of wonder I had known as a kid. I wanted the world to be what they had promised me it was going to be—instead of the tawdry, lousy, fouled-up mess it is.

I had had one chance—for ten minutes yesterday afternoon. Helen of Troy, whatever your true name may be— And I had known it . . . and I had let it slip away.

Maybe one chance is all you ever get.

The train pulled into Nice.

In the American Express office I went to the banking department and to my deposit box, found the ticket and checked the number against the Herald-Trib—XDY 34555, *yes!* To stop my trembling, I checked the other tickets and they were waste paper, just as I thought. I shoved them back into the box and asked to see the manager.

I had a money problem and American Express is a bank, not just a travel bureau. I was ushered into the manager's office and we exchanged names. "I need advice," I said. "You see, I hold a winning Sweepstake's ticket."

He broke into a grin. "Congratulations! You're the first person in a long time who has come in here with good news rather than a complaint."

"Thanks. Uh, my problem is this. I know that a ticket that draws a horse is worth quite a bit up until the race. Depending on the horse, of course."

"Of course," he agreed. "What horse did you draw?"

"A fairly good one, Lucky Star —and that's what makes it tough. If I had drawn H-Bomb, or any of the three favorites— Well, you see how it is. I don't know whether to sell or hang on, because I don't know how to figure the odds. Do you know what is being offered for Lucky Star?"

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He fitted his finger tips together. "Mr. Gordon, American Express does not give tips on horse races, nor broker the resale of Sweepstakes tickets. However— Do you have the ticket with you?"

I got it out and handed it to him. It had been through poker games and was sweat marked and crumpled. But that lucky number was unmistakable.

He looked at it. "Do you have your receipt?"

"Not with me." I started to explain that I had given my stepfather's address—and that my mail had been forwarded to Alaska, He cut me off. "That's all right." He touched a switch. "Alice, will you ask M'sieur Renault to step in?"

I was wondering if it really was all right. I had had the savvy to get names and new billets from the original ticket holders and each had promised to send his receipt to me when he got it—but no receipts had reached me. Maybe in Alaska—I had checked on this ticket while at the lock box; it had been bought by a sergeant now in Stuttgart. Maybe I would have to pay him something or maybe I would have to break his arms.

M. Renault looked like a tired school teacher. "M'sieur Renault is our expert on this sort of thing," the Manager explained. "Will you let him examine your ticket, please?"

The Frenchman looked at it, then his eyes lit up and he reached into a pocket, produced a jeweler's loupe, screwed it into his eye. "Excellent!" he said approvingly. "One of the best. Hong Kong, perhaps?"

"I bought it in Singapore."

He nodded and smiled. "That follows."

The Manager was not smiling. He reached into his desk and brought out another Sweepstake ticket and handed it to me. "Mr. Gordon, this one I bought at Monte Carlo. Will you compare it?"

They looked alike to me, except for serial numbers and the fact that his was crisp and clean. "What do I look for?"

"Perhaps this will help." He offered me a large reading glass.

A Sweepstake's ticket is printed on special paper and has an engraved portrait on it and is done in several colors. It is a better job of engraving and printing than many countries use for paper money.

I learned long ago that you can't change a deuce into an ace by staring at it. I handed back his ticket. "Mine is counterfeit."

"I didn't say so, Mr. Gordon. I suggest you get an outside opinion. Say at the office of the Bank of France."

"I can see it. The engraving lines aren't sharp and even on mine. They're broken, some places. Under the glass the print job looks smeared." I turned. "Right, M'sieur Renault?"

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The expert gave a shrug of commiseration. "It is beautiful work, of its sort."

I thanked them and got out. I checked with the Bank of France, not because I doubted the verdict but because you don't have a leg cut off, nor chuck away $140,000, without a second opinion. Their expert didn't bother with a loupe. "Contrefait," he announced. "Worthless."

It was impossible to get back to l'Île du Levant that night. I had dinner and then looked up my former landlady. My broom closet was empty and she let me have it overnight. I didn't lie awake long.

I was not as depressed as I thought I should be. I felt relaxed, almost relieved. For a while I had had the wonderful sensation of being rich—and I had had its complement, the worries of being rich—and both sensations were interesting and I didn't care to repeat them, not right away.

Now I had no worries. The only thing to settle was when to go home, and with living so cheap on the island there was no hurry. The only thing that fretted me was that rushing off to Nice might have caused me to miss "Helen of Troy," cette grande blonde! Si grande . . . . si belle . . . si majestesue! I feel asleep thinking of her.

I had intended to catch the early train, then the first boat. But the day before had used up most of the money on me and I had goofed by failing to get cash while at American Express. Besides, I had not asked for mail. I didn't expect any, other than from my mother and possibly my aunt—the only close friend I had had in the Army had been killed six months back. Still, I might as well pick up mail as long as I had to wait for money.

So I treated myself to a luxury breakfast. The French think that a man can face the day with chicory and milk, and a croissant, which probably accounts for their unstable politics. I picked a sidewalk cafè by a big kiosk, the only one in Nice that stocked *The Stars & Stripes* and where the Herald-Trib would be on sale as soon as it was in; ordered a melon, cafè complet for *two,* and an omelette aux herbes fines; and sat back to enjoy life.

When the Herald-Trib arrived, it detracted from my Sybaritic pleasure. The headlines were worse than ever and reminded me that I was still going to have to cope with the world; I couldn't stay on l'Île du Levant forever.

But why not stay there as long as possible? I still did not want to go to school, and that three-car garage ambition was as dead as that Sweepstake's ticket. If World War III was about to shift to a rolling boil, there was no point in being an engineer at six or eight

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thousand a year in Santa Monica only to be caught in the fire storm.

It would be better to live it up, gather ye rosebuds, carpe that old diem, with dollars and days at hand, then—Well, join the Marine Corps maybe, like my Dad. Maybe I could make corporal—and keep it.

I refolded the paper to the "Personals" column.

They were pretty good. Besides the usual offers of psychic readings and how to learn yoga and the veiled messages from one set of initials to another there were several that were novel. Such as—

"REWARD!! Are you contemplating suicide? Assign to me the lease on your apartment and I will make your last days lavish. Box 323, H-T"

Or: "Hindu gentleman, non-vegetarian, wishes to meet cultured European, African, or Asian lady owning sports car. Object: improving international relations. Box 107"

How do you do that in a sports car?

One was ominous—"Hermaphrodites of the World, Arise! You have nothing to lose but your chains. Tel. Opèra 56-09"

The next one started:

"ARE YOU A COWARD?"

Well, yes, certainly. If possible. If allowed a free choice. I read on:

"ARE YOU A COWARD? This is not for you. We badly need a brave man. He must be 23 to 25 years old, in perfect health, at least six feet tall, weigh about 190 pounds, fluent English with some French, proficient with all weapons, some knowledge of engineering and mathematics essential, willing to travel, no family or emotional ties, indomitably courageous and handsome of face and figure. Permanent employment, very high pay, glorious adventure, great danger. You must apply in person, 17, rue Dante, Nice, 2me ètage, appt. D"

I read that requirement about face and figure with strong relief. For a giddy moment it had seemed as if someone with a skewed sense of humor had aimed a shaggy joke right at me. Somebody who knew my habit of reading the "Personals."

That address was only a hundred yards from where I was sitting. I read the ad again.

Then I paid the addition, left a careful tip, went to the kiosk and bought *The Stars & Stripes*, walked to American Express, got money and picked up my mail, and on to the railroad station. It was over an hour until the next train to Toulon, so I went into the bar, ordered a beer and sat down to read.

Mother was sorry I had missed them in Wiesbaden. Her letter itemized the children's illnesses, the high prices in Alaska, and ex-

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pressed regret that they had ever had to leave Germany. I shoved it into my pocket and picked up *The Stars & Stripes.*

Presently I was reading: "ARE YOU A COWARD?"—same ad, right to the end.

I threw the paper down with a growl.

There were three other letters. One invited me to contribute to the athletic association of my ex-college; the second offered to advise me in the selection of my investments at a special rate of only $48 a year; the last was a plain envelope without a stamp, evidently handed in at American Express.

It contained only a newspaper clipping, starting: "ARE YOU A COWARD?"

It was the same as the other two ads except that in the last sentence one word had been underlined: "*You* must apply in person—"

I splurged on a cab to rue Dante. If I hurried, there was time to untangle this hopscotch and still catch the Toulon train. No. 17 was a walk-up; I ran up and, as I approached suite D, I met a young man coming out. He was six feet tall, handsome of face and figure, and looked as if he might be a hermaphrodite.

The lettering on the door read: "Dr. Balsamo—Hours by Appointment," in both French and English. The name sounded familiar and vaguely phony but I did not stop to figure it out; I pushed on in.

The office inside was cluttered in a fashion known only to old French lawyers and pack rats. Behind the desk was a gnomelike character with a merry smile, hard eyes, the pinkest face and scalp I've ever seen, and a fringe of untidy white hair. He looked at me and giggled. "Welcome! So *you* are a hero?" Suddenly he whipped out a revolver half as long as he was and just as heavy and pointed it at me. You could have driven a Volkswagen down its snout.

"I'm not a hero," I said nastily. "I'm a coward. I just came here to find out what the joke is." I moved sideways while slapping that monstrous piece of ordnance the other way, chopped his wrist, and caught it. Then I handed it back to him. "Don't play with that thing, or I'll shove it up your deposition. I'm in a hurry. You're Doctor Balsamo? You ran that ad?"

"Tut, tut," he said, not at all annoyed. "Impetuous youth. No, Doctor Balsamo is in there." He pointed his eyebrows at two doors on the left wall, then pushed a bell button on his desk—the only thing in the room later than Napoleon. "Go in. She's expecting you."

"'She'? Which door?

"Ah, the Lady or the Tiger? Does it matter? In the long run? A hero will know. A coward will

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choose the wrong one, being sure that I lie. Allez-y! Vite, vite! Schnell! Get the lead out, Mac."

I snorted and jerked open the righthand door.

The doctor was standing with her back to me at some apparatus against the far wall and she was wearing one of those white, high-collared jackets favored by medical men. On my left was a surgeon's examining table, on my right a Swedish-modern couch; there were stainless steel and glass cabinets, and some framed certificates; the whole place was as up-to-date as the outer room was not.

As I closed the door she turned and looked at me and said quietly, "I am very glad that you have come." Then she smiled and said softly, "You are beautiful," and came into my arms.

IV

ABOUT A MINUTE AND FORTY seconds and several centuries later "Dr. Balsamo-Helen of Troy" pulled her mouth an inch back from mine and said, "Let me go, please, then undress and lie on the examining table."

I felt as if I had had nine hours of sleep, a needle shower, and three slugs of ice-cold akvavit on an empty stomach. Anything she wanted to do, I wanted to do. But the situation seemed to call for witty repartee. "Huh?" I said.

"Please. You are the one, but nevertheless I must examine you."

"Well . . . all right," I agreed. "You're the doctor," I added and started to unbutton my shirt. "You *are* a doctor? Of medicine, I mean."

"Yes. Among other things."

I kicked out of my shoes. "But why do you want to examine *me?*"

"For witch's marks, perhaps. Oh, I shan't find any, I know. But I must search for other things, too. To protect you."

That table was cold against my skin. Why don't they pad those things? "Your name is Balsamo?"

"One of my names," she said absently while gentle fingers touched me here and there. "A family name, that is."

"Wait a minute. *Count Cagliostro!*"

"One of my uncles. Yes, he used that name. Though it isn't truly his, no more than Balsamo. Uncle Joseph is a very naughty man and quite untruthful." She touched an old, small scar. "Your appendix has been removed."

"Yes."

"Good. Let me see your teeth."

I opened wide. My face may not be much but I could rent my teeth to advertise Pepsodent. Presently she nodded. "Fluoride marks. Good. Now I must have your blood."

She could have bitten me in the

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neck for it and I wouldn't have minded. Nor been much surprised. But she did it the ordinary way, taking ten cc. from the vein inside my left elbow. She took the sample and put it in that apparatus against the wall. It chirred and whirred and she came back to me. "Listen, Princess," I said.

"I am not a princess."

"Well . . . I don't know your first name, and you inferred that your last name isn't really 'Balsamo'—and I don't want to call you 'Doc.'" I certainly did not want to call her "Doc"—not the most beautiful girl I had ever seen or hoped to see . . . not after a kiss that had wiped out of memory every other kiss I had ever received. No.

She considered it. "I have many names. What would you like to call me?"

"Is one of them 'Helen'?"

She smiled like sunshine and I learned that she had dimples. She looked sixteen and in her first party dress. "You are very gracious. No, she's not even a relative. That was many, many years ago." Her face turned thoughtful. "Would you like to call me 'Ettarre'?"

"Is that one of your names?"

"It is much like one of them, allowing for different spelling and accent. Or it could be 'Esther' just as closely. Or 'Aster.'"

"'Aster,'" I repeated. "Star. Lucky Star!"

"I hope that I will be your lucky star," she said earnestly. "As you will. But what shall I call you?"

I thought about it. I certainly was not going to dig up "Flash"—I am not a comic strip. The Army nickname I had held longest was entirely unfit to hand to a lady. At that I preferred it to my given name. My Daddy had been proud of a couple of his ancestors—but is that any excuse for hanging "Evelyn Cyril" on a male child? It had forced me to learn to fight before I learned to read.

The name I had picked up in the hospital ward would do. I shrugged. "Oh, Scar is a good enough name."

"'Oscar,'" she repeated, broadening the "O" into "Aw," and stressing both syllables. "A noble name. A hero's name. Oscar." She caressed it with her voice.

"No, no! Not 'Oscar'—'Scar.' 'Scarface.' For this."

"Oscar is your name," she said firmly. "Oscar and Aster. Scar and Star." She barely touched the scar. "Do you dislike your hero's mark? Shall I remove it?"

"Eh? Oh, no, I'm used to it now. It lets me know who it is when I see myself in a mirror."

"Good. I like it, you wore it when I first saw you. But if you change your mind, let me know." The gear against the wall went whush, chunk! She turned and took a long strip from it, then

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whistled softly while she studied it.

"This won't take long," she said cheerfully and wheeled the apparatus over to the table. "Hold still while the protector is connected with you, quite still and breathe shallowly." She made half a dozen connections of tubes to me; they stuck where she placed them. She put over her head what I thought was a fancy stethoscope but it also covered her eyes.

She chuckled. "You're pretty inside, too, Oscar. No, don't talk." She kept one hand on my forearm and I waited.

Five minutes later she lifted her hand and stripped off the connections. "That's all," she said cheerfully. "No more colds for you, my hero, and you won't be bothered again by that flux you picked up in the jungle. Now we move to the other room."

I got off the table and grabbed at my clothes. Star said, "You won't need them where we are going. Full kit and weapons will be provided."

I stopped with shoes in one hand and drawers in the other. "Star—"

"Yes, Oscar?"

"What is this all about? Did you run that ad? Was it meant for *me*? Did you really want to hire me for something?"

She took a deep breath and said soberly, "I advertised. It was meant for you and you only. Yes, there is a job to do . . . as my champion. There will be great adventure . . . and greater treasure . . . and even greater danger—and I fear very much that neither one of us will live through it." She looked me in the eyes. "Well, sir?"

I wondered how long they had had me in the locked ward. But I didn't tell her so, because, if that was where I was, she wasn't there at all. And I wanted her to be there, more than I had ever wanted anything. I said, "Princess . . . you've hired yourself a boy."

She caught her breath. "Come quickly. Time is short." She led me through a door beyond the Swedish-modern couch, unbuttoning her jacket, unzipping her skirt, as she went, and letting garments fall anywhere. Almost at once she was as I had first seen her at the plage.

This room had dark walls and no windows and a soft light from nowhere. There were two low couches side by side, black they were and looking like biers, and no other furniture. As soon as the door was closed behind us I was suddenly aware that the room was achingly painfully anechoic; the bare walls gave back no sound.

The couches were in the center of a circle which was part of a larger design, in chalk, or white paint, on bare floor. We entered the pattern; she turned and squatted down and completed one line,

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closing it—and it was true; she was unable to be awkward, even hunkered down, even with her breasts drooping as she leaned over.

"What is it?" I asked.

"A map to take us where we are going."

"It looks more like a pentagram."

She shrugged. "All right, it is a pentacle of power. A schematic circuit diagram would be a better tag. But, my hero, I can't stop to explain it. Lie down, please, at once."

I took the righthand couch as she signed me, but I couldn't let it be. "Star, are you a witch?"

"If you like. Please, no talking now." She lay down, stretched out her hand. "And join hands with me, my lord; it is necessary."

Her hand was soft and warm and very strong. Presently the light faded to red, then died away. I slept.

V

I WOKE TO SINGING BIRDS.

Her hand was still in mine. I turned my head and she smiled at me. "Good morning, my lord."

"Good morning, Princess." I glanced around. We were still lying on those black couches but they were outdoors, in a grassy dell, a clearing in trees beside a softly chuckling stream—a place so casually beautiful that it looked as if it had been put together leaf by leaf by old and unhurried Japanese gardeners.

Warm sunshine splashed through leaves and dappled her golden body. I glanced up at the sun and back at her. "Is it morning?" It had been noonish or later and that sun ought to be—seemed to be—setting, not rising—

"It is again morning, here."

Suddenly my bump of direction spun like a top and I felt dizzy. Disoriented—a feeling new to me and very unpleasant. I couldn't find north.

Then things steadied down. North was *that* way, upstream—and the sun was rising, maybe nine in the morning, and would pass across the *north* sky. Southern hemisphere. No sweat.

No trick at all—Just give the kook a shot of dope while examining him, lug him aboard a 707 and jet him to New Zealand, replenishing the Micky Finn as needed. Wake him up when you want him.

Only I didn't say this and never did think it. And it wasn't true.

She sat up. "Are you hungry?"

I suddenly realized that an omelette some hours ago—how many?—was not enough for a growing boy. I sat up and swung my feet to the grass. "I could eat a horse."

She grinned. "The shop of La Société Anonyme de Hippophage

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is closed I'm afraid. Will you settle for trout? We must wait a bit, so we might as well eat. And don't worry, this place is defended.'

" 'Defended?' "

"Safe."

"All right. Uh, how about a rod and hooks?"

"I'll show you." What she showed me was not fishing tackle but how to tickle fish. But I knew how. We waded into that lovely stream, just pleasantly cool, moving as quietly as possible, and picked a place under a bulging rock, a place where trout like to gather and think—the fishy equivalent of a gentlemen's club.

You tickle trout by gaining their confidence and then abusing it. In about two minutes I got one, between two and three pounds, and tossed it onto the bank, and Star had one also. "How much can you eat?" she asked.

"Climb out and get dry," I said. "I'll get another one."

"Make it two or three," she amended. "Rufo will be along." She waded quietly out.

"Who?"

"Your groom."

I didn't argue. I was ready to believe seven impossible things before breakfast, so I went on catching breakfast. I let it go with two more as the last was the biggest trout I've ever seen. Those beggars fairly queued up to be grabbed.

By then Star had a fire going and was cleaning fish with a sharp rock. Shucks, any Girl Scout or witch can make fire without matches. I could myself, given several hours and plenty of luck, just by rubbing two dry clichés together. But I noticed that the two short biers were gone. Well, I hadn't ordered them. I squatted down and took over cleaning the trout.

Star came back shortly with fruits that were applelike but deep purple in color and with quantities of button mushrooms. She was carrying the plunder on a broad leaf, life canna, or ti, only bigger. More like banana leaves.

My mouth started to water. "If only we had salt!"

"I'll fetch it. It will be rather gritty, I'm afraid."

Star broiled the fish two ways, over the fire on a forked green stick, and on hot flat limestone where the fire had been—she kept brushing the fire along as she fed it and placed fish and mushrooms sizzling where it had been. That way was best, I thought. Little fine grasses turned out to be chives, local style, and tiny clover tasted and looked like sheep sorrel. That, with the salt (which was gritty and coarse and may have been licked by animals before we got it—not that I cared) made the trout the best I've ever tasted. Well, weather and scenery and company had much to do with

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it, too, especially the company.

I was trying to think of a really poetic way of saying, "How about you and me shacking up right here for the next ten thousand years? Either legal or informal—are you married?" when we were interrupted. Which was a shame, for I had thought up some pretty language, all new, for the oldest and most practical suggestion in the world.

Old baldy, the gnome with the oversized six-shooter, was standing behind me and cursing.

I was sure it was cursing although the language was new to me. Star turned her head, spoke in quiet reproval in the same language, made room for him and offered him a trout. He took it and ate quite a bit of it before he said, in English, "Next time I won't pay him anything. You'll see."

"You shouldn't try to cheat him, Rufo. Have some mushrooms. Where's the baggage? I want to get dressed."

"Over there." He went back to wolfing fish. Rufo was proof that some people should wear clothes. He was pink all over and somewhat pot-bellied. However, he was amazingly well muscled, which I had never suspected, else I would have been more cautious about taking that cannon away from him. I decided that if he wanted to Indian-wrestle, I would cheat.

He glanced at me past a pound and a half of trout and said, "Is it your wish to be outfitted now, my lord?"

"Huh? Finish your breakfast. And what's this 'my lord' routine? Last time I saw you you were waving a gun in my face."

"I'm sorry, my lord. But *She* said to do it . . . and what *She* says must be done."

"That suits me perfectly. Somebody has to drive. But call me 'Oscar.' "

Rufo glanced at Star, she nodded. He grinned. "Okay, Oscar. No hard feelings?"

"Not a bit."

He put down the fish, wiped his hand on his thigh, and stuck it out. "Swell! You knock 'em down, I'll stomp on 'em."

We shook hands and each of us tried for the knuckle-cracking grip. I think I got a little the better of it, but I decided he might have been a blacksmith at some time.

Star looked very pleased and showed dimples again. She had been lounging by the fire, looking like a hamadryad on her coffee break; now she suddenly reached out and placed her strong, slender hand over our clasped fists. "My stout friends," she said earnestly. "My good boys. Rufo, it will be well."

"You have a Sight?" he said eargerly.

"No, just a feeling. But I am no longer worried."

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"We can't do a thing," Rufo said moodily, "until we deal with Igli."

"Oscar will dicker with Igli." Then she was on her feet in one smooth motion. "Stuff that fish in your face and unpack. I need clothes." She suddenly looked very eager.

Star was more different women than a platoon of WACs—which is only mildly a figure of speech. Right then she was every woman from Eve deciding between two fig leaves to a modern woman whose ambition is to be turned loose in Nieman-Marcus, naked with a check book. When I first met her, she had seemed rather a sobersides and no more interested in clothes than I was. I'd never had a chance to be interested in clothes. Being a member of the sloppy generation was a boon to my budget at college, where blue jeans were au fait and a dirty sweat shirt was stylish.

The second time I saw her she had been dressed, but in that lab smock and tailored skirt she had been both a professional woman and a warm friend. But today—this morning whenever that was—she was increasingly full of bubbles. She had delighted so in catching fish that she had had to smother squeals of glee. And she had then been the perfect Girl Scout, with soot smudged on her cheek and her hair pushed back out of hazard of the cooking fire.

Now she was the woman of all ages who just has to get her hands on new clothes. I felt that dressing Star was like putting a paint job on the crown jewels—but I was forced to admit that, if we were not to do the "Me Tarzan, you Jane" bit right in that dell from then on till death do us part, then clothes of some sort, if only to keep her perfect skin from getting scratched by brambles, were needed.

Rufo's baggage turned out to be a little black box about the size and shape of a portable typewriter. He opened it.

And opened it again.

And kept on opening it—

And kept right on unfolding its sides and letting them down until the durn thing was the size of a small moving van and even more packed. Since I was nicknamed "Truthful James" as soon as I learned to talk and am widely known to have won the hatchet every February 22nd all through school, you must now conclude that I was the victim of an illusion caused by hypnosis and/or drugs.

Me, I'm not sure. Anyone who has studied math knows that the inside does not have to be smaller than the outside, in theory, and anyone who has had the doubtful privilege of seeing a fat woman get in or out of a tight girdle knows that this is true in practice, too. Rufo's baggage just car-

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ried the principle further.

The first thing he dragged out was a big teakwood chest. Star opened it and started pulling out filmy lovelies.

"Oscar, what do you think of this one?" She was holding a long, green dress against her with the skirt draped over one hip to display it. "Like it?"

Of course I liked it. If it was an original—and somewhow I knew that Star never wore copies—I didn't want to think about what it must have cost. "It's a mighty pretty gown," I told her. "But—Look, are we going to be traveling?"

"Right away."

"I don't see any taxicabs. Aren't you likely to get that torn?"

"It doesn't tear. However, I didn't mean to wear it; I just meant to show it to you. Isn't it lovely? Shall I model it for you? Rufo, I want those high-heeled sandals with the emeralds."

Rufo answered in that language he had been cursing in when he arrived. Star shrugged and said, "Don't be impatient, Rufo; Igli will wait. Anyway, we can't talk to Igli earlier than tomorrow morning; milord Oscar must learn the language first." But she put the green gorgeousness back into the chest.

"Now here is a little number," she went on, holding it up, "which is just plain naughty; it has no other purpose."

I could see why. It was mostly skirt, with a little bodice that supported without concealing—a style favored in ancient Crete, I hear, and still popular in the *Overseas Weekly*, *Playboy*, and many night clubs. A style that turns droopers into bulgers. Not that Star needed it.

Rufo tapped me on the shoulder. "Boss? Want to look over the ordnance and pick out what you need?"

Star said reprovingly, "Rufo, life is to be savored, not hurried."

"We'll have a lot more life to savor if Oscar picks out what he can use best."

"He won't need weapons until after we reach a settlement with Igli." But she didn't insist on showing more clothes and, while I enjoyed looking at Star, I like to check over weapons, too, especially when I might have to use them, as apparently the job called for.

While I had been watching Star's style show, Rufo had laid out a collection that looked like a cross between an army-surplus store and a museum—swords, pistols, a lance that must have been twenty feet long, a flamethrower, two bazookas flanking a Tommy gun, brass knucks, a machete, grenades, bows and arrows, a misericorde—

"You didn't bring a slingshot"? I said accusingly.

He looked smug. "Which kind

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do you like, Oscar? The forked sort? Or a real sling?"

"Sorry I mentioned it. I can't hit the floor with either sort." I picked up the Tommy chopper, checked that it was empty, started stripping it. I seemed almost new, just fired enough to let the moving parts work in. A Tommy isn't much more accurate than a pitched baseball and hasn't much greater effective range. But it does have virtues—you hit a man with it, he goes down and stays down. It is short and not too heavy and has a lot of fire power for a short time. It is a bush weapon, or any other sort of close-quarters work.

But I like something with a bayonet on the end, in case the party gets intimate—and I like that something to be accurate at long range in case the neighbors get unfriendly from a distance. I put it down and picked up a Springfield—Rock Island Arsenal, as I saw by its serial number, but still a "Springfield." I feel the way about a Springfield that I do about a Gooney Bird; some pieces of machinery are ultimate perfection of their sort, the only possible improvement is a radical change in design.

I opened the bolt, stuck my thumbnail in the chamber, looked down the muzzle. The barrel was bright and the lands were unworn —and the muzzle had that tiny star on it; it was a match weapon!

"Rufo, what sort of country will we be going through? Like this around us?"

"Today, yes. But—" He apologetically took the rifle out of my hands. "It is forbidden to use firearms here. Swords, knives, arrows —anything that cuts or stabs or mauls by your own muscle power. No guns."

"Who says so?"

He shivered. "Better ask *Her*."

"If we can't use them, why bring them? And I don't see any ammunition around anyhow."

"Plenty of ammunition. Later on we will be at—another place —where guns may be used. If we live that long. I was just showing you what we have. What do you like of the lawful weapons? Are you a bowman?"

"I don't know. Show me how."

He started to say something, then shrugged and selected a bow, slipped a leather guard over his left forearm, picked out an arrow. "That tree," he said, "the one with the white rock at the foot of it. I'll try for about as high off the ground as a man's heart."

He nocked the shaft, raised and bent and let fly, all in one smooth motion.

The arrow quivered in the tree trunk about four feet off the ground.

Rufo grinned. "Care to match that?"

I didn't answer. I knew I could not, except by accident. I had once owned a bow, a birthday

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present. I hadn't hit much with it and soon the arrows were lost. Nevertheless I made a production out of selecting a bow, and picked the longest and heaviest.

Rufo cleared his throat apologetically. "If I may make a suggestion, that one will pull quite hard —for a beginner."

I strung it. "Find me a leather."

The leather slipped on as if it had been made for me and perhaps it had. I picked an arrow to match, barely looked at it as they all seemed straight and true. I didn't have any hope of hitting that bloody tree; it was fifty yards away and not over a foot thick. I simply intended to sight a bit high on the trunk and hope that so heavy a bow would give me a flattish trajectory. Mostly I wanted to nock, bend, and loose all in one motion as Rufo had done—to *look* like Robin Hood even though I was not.

But as I raised and bent that bow and felt the power of it, I felt a surge of exultance—this tool was right for me! We fitted.

I let fly without thinking.

My shaft thudded a hand's breadth from his.

"Well shot!" Star called out.

Rufo looked at the tree and blinked, then looked reproachfully at Star. She looked haughtily back. "I did not," she stated. "You know I would not do that. It was a fair trial . . . and a credit to you both."

Rufo looked thoughtfully at me. "Hm—Would you care to make a small bet—you name the odds—that you can do that again?"

"I won't bet," I said. "I'm chicken." But I picked up another arrow and nocked it. I liked that bow, I even liked the way the string whanged at the guard on my forearm; I wanted to try it, feel married to it, again.

I loosed it.

The third arrow grew out of a spot between the first two, but closer to his. "Nice bow," I said. "I'll keep it. Fetch the shafts."

Rufo trotted away without speaking. I unstrung the bow, then started looking over the cutlery. I hoped that I would never again have to shoot an arrow; a gambler can't expect to draw a pat hand every deal—my next shot would likely turn around like a boomerang.

There was too much wealth of edges and points, from a two-handed broad sword suitable for chopping down trees to a little dagger meant for a lady's stocking. But I picked up and balanced them all . . . and found there the blade that suited me the way Excalibur suited Arthur.

I've never seen one quite like it so I don't know what to call it. A sabre, I suppose, as the blade was faintly curved and razor sharp on the edge and sharp rather far back on the back. But it had a point as deadly as a rapier and the curve

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was not enough to keep it from being used for thrust and counter quite as well as chopping away meat-axe style. The guard was a bell curved back around the knuckles into semi-basket but cut away enough to permit full moulinet from any guard.

It balanced in the forte less than two inches from the guard, yet the blade was heavy enough to chop bone. It was the sort of sword that feels as if it were an extension of your body.

The grip was honest sharkskin, molded to my hand. There was a motto chased onto the blade but it was so buried in curlycues that I did not take time to study it out. This girl was mine, we fitted! I returned it and buckled belt and scabbard to my bare waist, wanting the touch of it and feeling like Captain John Carter, Jeddak of Jeddaks, and the Gascon and his three friends all in one.

"Will you not dress, milord Oscar?" Star asked.

"Eh oh, certainly—I was just trying it on for size. But—Did Rufo fetch my clothes?"

"Did you, Rufo?"

"His clothes? He wouldn't want those things he was wearing in Nice!"

"What's wrong with wearing Lederhosen with an aloha shirt?" I demanded.

"What? Oh, nothing at all, milord Oscar," Rufo answered hastily. "Live and let live I always say. I knew a man who wore—never mind. Let me show you what I fetched for you."

I had my choice of everything from a plastic raincoat to full armor. I found the latter depressing because its presence implied that it might be needed. Except for an Army helmet I had never worn armor, didn't want to, didn't know how—and didn't care to mix with rude company that made such protection desirable.

Besides, I didn't see a horse around, say a Percheron or a Clydesdale, and I couldn't see myself hiking in one of those tin suits. I'd be slow as crutches, noisy as a subway, and hot as a phone booth. Sweat off ten pounds in five miles. The quilted long-johns that go under that ironmongery would have been too much alone for such beautiful weather; steel on top would turn me into a walking oven and leave me too weak and clumsy to fight my way out of a traffic ticket.

"Star, you said that—" I stopped. She had finished dressing and hadn't overdone it. Soft leather hiking shoes—buskins really—brown tights, and a short green upper garment half way between a jacket and a skating dress. This was topped by a perky little hat and the whole costume made her look like a musical comedy version of an airline hostess, smart, cute, wholesome, and sexy.

Or maybe Maid Marian, as she

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had added a double-curve bow about half the size of mine, a quiver, and a dagger. "You," I said, "look like why the riot started."

She dimpled and curtsied. (Star never pretended. She knew she was female, she knew she looked good, she liked it that way.) "You said something earlier," I continued, "about my not needing weapons just yet. Is there any reason why I should wear one of these space suits? They don't look comfortable."

"I don't expect any great danger today," she said slowly. "But this is not a place where one can call the police. You must decide what you need."

"But—Damn it, Princess, you know this place and I don't. I need advice."

She didn't answer. I turned to Rufo. He was carefully studying a tree top. I said, "Rufo, get dressed."

He raised his eyebrows. "Milord Oscar?"

"Schnell! Vite, vite! Get the lead out."

"Okay." He dressed quickly, in an outfit that was a man's version of what Star had selected, with shorts instead of tights.

"Arm yourself," I said, and started to dress the same way, except that I intended to wear field boots. However, there was a pair of those buskins that appeared to be my size, so I tried them on. They snuggled to my feet like gloves and, anyway, my soles were so hardened by a month barefooted on l'Île du Levant that I didn't need heavy boots.

They were not as medieval as they looked; they zipped up the front and were marked inside "Fabriqué en France."

Pops Rufo had taken the bow he had used before, selected a sword, and had added a dagger. Instead of a dagger I picked out a Solingen hunting knife. I looked longingly at a service .45, but didn't touch it. If "they," whoever they were, had a local Sullivan Act, I would go along with the gag.

Star told Rufo to pack, then squatted down with me at a sandy place by the stream and drew a sketch map—route south, dropping down grade and following the stream except for short cuts, until we reached the Singing Waters. There we would camp for the night.

I got it in my head. "Okay. Anything to warn me about? Do we shoot first? Or wait for them to bomb us?"

"Nothing that I expect, today. Oh, there's a carnivore about three times the size of a lion. But it is a great coward; it won't attack a moving man."

"A fellow after my own heart. All right, we'll keep moving."

"If we do see human beings—I don't expect it—it might be well to nock a shaft . . . but not

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raise your bow until you feel it is necessary. But I'm not telling you what to do, Oscar; you must decide. Nor will Rufo let fly unless he sees you about to do so."

Rufo had finished packing. "Okay, let's go," I said. We set out. Rufo's little black box was now rigged as a knapsack and I did not stop to wonder how he could carry a couple of tons on his shoulders. An anti-grav device like Buck Rogers, maybe. Chinese coolie blood. Black magic. Hell, that teakwood chest alone could not have fitted into that backpack by a factor of 30 to 1, not to mention the arsenal and assorted oddments.

There is no reason to wonder why I didn't quiz Star as to where we were, why we were there, how we had got there, what we were going to do, and the details of these dangers I was expected to face. Look, Mac, when you are having the most gorgeous dream of your life and just getting to the point, do you stop to tell yourself that it is logically impossible for that particular babe to be in the hay with you—and thereby wake yourself up? I *knew,* logically, that everything that had happened since I read that silly ad had been impossible.

So I chucked logic.

Logic is a feeble reed, friend. "Logic" proved that airplanes can't fly and that H-bombs won't work and that stones don't fall out of the sky. Logic is a way of saying that anything which didn't happen yesterday won't happen tomorrow.

I liked the situation. I didn't want to wake up, whether in bed, or in a headshrinker ward. Most especially I did not want to wake up still back in that jungle, maybe with that face wound still fresh and no helicopter. Maybe little brown brother had done a full job on me and sent me to Valhalla. Okay, I liked Valhalla.

I was swinging along with a sweet sword knocking against my thigh and a much sweeter girl matching my strides and a slave-serf-groom-something sweating along behind us, doing the carrying and being our "eyes-behind." Birds were singing and the landscape had been planned by master landscape architects and the air smelled sweet and good. If I never dodged a taxi nor read a headline again, that suited me.

That longbow was a nuisance—but so is an M-1. Star had her little bow slung, shoulder to hip. I tried that, but it tended to catch on things. Also, it made me nervous not to have it ready since she had admitted a chance of needing it. So I unslung it and carried it in my left hand, strung and ready.

We had one alarum on the morning hike. I heard Rufo's bowstring go *thwung!*—and I whirled and had my own bow ready, arrow nocked, before I saw what was up.

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Or down, rather. A bird like a dusky grouse but larger. Rufo had picked it off a branch, right through the neck. I made note not to compete with him again in archery.

He smacked his lips and grinned. "Supper!" For the next mile he plucked it as we walked, then hung it from his belt.

We stopped for lunch one o'clockish at a picnic spot that Star assured me was defended, and Rufo opened his box to suitcase size, and served us lunch: cold cuts, crumbly Provençal cheese, crusty French bread, pears, and two bottles of Chablis. After lunch Star suggested a siesta. The idea was appealing; I had eaten heartily and shared only crumbs with the birds, but I was surprised. "Shouldn't we push on?"

"You must have a language lesson, Oscar."

I must tell them at Ponce de Leon High School the better way to study languages. You lie down on soft grass near a chuckling stream on a perfect day, and the most beautiful woman in any world bends over you and looks you in the eyes. She starts speaking softly in a language you do not understand.

After a bit her big eyes get bigger and bigger . . . and bigger . . . and you sink into them.

Then, a long time later, Rufo says, "Erbas, Oscar, 't knila voorsht."

"Okay," I answered, "I *am* getting up. Don't rush me."

That is the last word I am going to set down in a language that doesn't fit our alphabet. I had several more lessons, and won't mention them either, and from then on we spoke this lingo, except when I was forced to span gaps by asking in English. It is a language rich in profanity and in words for making love, and richer than English in some technical subjects—but with surprising holes in it. There is no word for "lawyer" for example.

About an hour before sundown we came to the Singing Waters.

We had been traveling over a high, wooded plateau. The brook where we had caught the trout had been joined by other streams and was now a big creek. Below us, at a place we hadn't reached yet, it would plunge over high cliff in a super-Yosemite fall. But here, where we stopped to camp, the water had cut a notch into the plateau, forming cascades, before it took that dive.

"Cascades" is a weak word. Upstream, downstream, everywhere you looked, you saw waterfalls—big ones thirty or fifty feet high, little ones a mouse could have jumped up, every site in between. Terraces and staircases of them there were, hundreds of falls and each more beautiful than the other—smooth water green from rich foliage overhead and water white

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as whipped cream as it splashed into dense foam.

And you heard them. Tiny falls tinkled in silvery soprano, big falls rumbled in basso profundo. On the grassy alp where we camped it was an everpresent chorale; in the middle of the falls you had to shout to make yourself heard.

Coleridge was there in one of his dope dreams:

"And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.
But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover
A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!
And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething—"

Coleridge must have followed that route and reached the Singing Waters. No wonder he felt like killing that "person from Porlock" who broke in on his best dream. When I am dying, lay me beside the Singing Waters and let them be the last I hear and see.

We stopped on a lawn terrace, flat as a promise and soft as a kiss, and I helped Rufo unpack. I wanted to learn how he did that trick with the box. I didn't find out. Each side opened as naturally and reasonably as opening up an ironing board—and then when it opened again that was natural and reasonable, too.

First we pitched a tent for Star —no army-surplus job, this; it was a dainty pavilion of embroidered silk and the rug we spread as a floor must have used up three generations of Bukhara artists. Rufo said to me, "Do you want a tent, Oscar?"

I looked up at the sky and over at the not-yet-setting sun. The air was milk warm and I couldn't believe that it would rain. I don't like to be in a tent if there is the least chance of surprise attack. "Are you going to use a tent?"

"Me? Oh, no! But *She* has to have a tent, always. Then, more likely than not, *She*'ll decide to sleep out on the grass."

"I won't need a tent." (Let's see, does a "champion" sleep across the door of his lady's chamber, weapons at hand? I wasn't sure about the etiquette of such things; they were never mentioned in "Social Studies.")

She returned then and said to Rufo, "Defended. The wards were all in place."

"Recharged?" he fretted.

She tweaked his ear. "I am not senile." She added, "Soap, Rufo. And come along, Oscar; that's Rufo's work."

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Rufo dug a cake of Lux out of that caravan load and gave it to her, then looked at me thoughtfully and handed me a bar of Life Buoy.

The Singing Waters are the best bath ever, in endless variety. Still pools from footbath size to plunges you could swim in, sitz baths that tingled your skin, shower baths from just a trickle up to free-springing jets that would beat your brains in if you stood under them too long.

And you could pick your temperature. Above the cascade we used a hot spring added itself to the main stream and at the base of this cascade a hidden spring welled out icy cold. No need to fool with taps, just move one way or the other for the temperature you like—or move downstream where it evened out to temperature as gently warm as a mother's kiss.

We played for a while, with Star squealing and giggling when I splashed her, and answering it by ducking me. We both acted like kids; I felt like one, she looked like one, and she played rough, with muscles of steel under velvet.

Presently I fetched the soap and we scrubbed. When she started shampooing her hair, I came up behind her and helped. She let me, she needed help with the lavish mop, six times as much as most gals bother with these days.

That would have been a wonderful time (with Rufo busy and out of the way) to grab her and hug her, then proceed ruggedly to other matters. Nor am I sure that she would have made even a token protest; she might have cooperated heartily.

Hell, I *know* she would not have made a "token" protest. She would either have put me in my place with a cold word or a clout in the ear—or cooperated.

I couldn't do it. I couldn't even *start.*

I don't know why. My intentions toward Star had oscillated from dishonorable to honorable and back again, but had always been practical from the moment I laid eyes on her. No, let me put it this way: My intentions were strictly dishonorable always, but with utter willingness to convert them to honorable, later, as soon as we could dig up a justice of the peace.

Yet I found I couldn't lay a finger on her other than to help her scrub the soap out of her hair.

While I was puzzling over this, both hands buried in heavy blond hair and wondering what was stopping me from putting my arms around that slender-strong waist only inches away from me, I heard a piercing whistle and my name—my new name. I looked around.

Rufo, dressed in his unlovely skin and with towels over his shoulder, was standing on the bank ten feet away and trying to

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cut through the roar of water to get my attention.

I moved a few feet toward him. "How's that again?" I didn't quite snarl.

"I said, 'Do you want a shave'? Or are you growing a beard?"

I had been uneasily aware of my face cactus while I was debating whether or not to attempt criminal assault, and that unease had helped to stop me—Gillette, Aqua Velva, Burma Shave, et al., have made the browbeaten American male, namely me, timid about attempting seduction and/or rape unless freshly planed off. And I had a two-day growth.

"I don't have a razor," I called back.

He answered by holding up a straight razor.

Star moved up beside me. She reached up and tried my chin between thumb and forefinger. "You would be majestic in a beard," she said. "Perhaps a Van Dyke, with sneering moustachios."

I thought so too, if she thought so. Besides, it would cover most of that scar. "Whatever you say, Princess."

"But I would rather that you stayed as I first saw you. Rufo is a good barber." She turned toward him. "A hand, Rufo. And my towel."

Star walked back toward the camp, toweling herself dry—I would have been glad to help, if asked. Rufo said tiredly, "Why didn't you assert yourself? But *She* says to shave you, so now I've got to—and rush through my own bath, too, so *She* won't be kept waiting."

"If you've got a mirror, I'll do it myself."

"Ever used a straight razor?"

"No, but I can learn."

"You'd cut your throat, and *She* wouldn't like that. Over here on the bank where I can stand in the warm water. No, no! Don't sit on it, lie down with your head at the edge. I can't shave a man who's sitting up." He started working lather into my chin.

"You know why? I learned how on corpses, that's why, making them pretty so that their loved ones would be proud of them. Hold still! You almost lost an ear. I like to shave corpses; they can't complain, they don't make suggestions, they don't talk back—and they always hold still. Best job I ever had. But now you take this job—" He stopped with the blade against my Adam's apple and started counting his troubles.

"Do I get Saturday off? Hell, I don't even get Sunday off! And look at the hours! Why, I read just the other day that some outfit in New York— You've been in New York?"

"I've been in New York. And get that guillotine away from my neck while you're waving your hands like that."

"You keep talking, you're bound

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to get a little nick now and then. This outfit signed a contract for a twenty-five hour week. *Week!* I'd like to settle for a twenty-five hour *day*. You know how long I've been on the go, right this minute?"

I said I didn't.

"There, you talked again. More than seventy hours or I'm a liar! And for what? Glory? Is there glory in a little heap of whitened bones? Wealth? Oscar, I'm telling you the truth; I've laid out more corpses than a sultan has concubines and never a one of them cared a soggy pretzel whether they were bedecked in rubies the size of your nose and twice as red . . . or rags. What use is wealth to a dead man? Tell me, Oscar, man to man while *She* can't hear why did you ever let *Her* talk you into this?"

"I'm enjoying it, so far."

He sniffed. "That's what the man said as he passed the fiftieth floor of the Empire State Building. But the sidewalk was waiting for him, just the same. However," he added darkly, "until you settle with Igli, it's not a problem. If I had my kit, I could cover that scar so perfectly that everybody would say, 'Doesn't he look natural?' "

"Never mind. *She* likes that scar." (Damn it, he had *me* doing it!)

"*She* would. What I'm trying to get over is, if you walk the Glory Road, you are certain to find mostly rocks. But I never chose to walk it. My idea of a nice way to live would be a quiet little parlor, the only one in town, with a selection of caskets, all prices, and a markup that allowed a little leeway to show generosity to the bereaved. Installment plans for those with the foresight to do their planning in advance—for we all have to die, Oscar, we all have to die, and a sensible man might as well sit down over a friendly glass of beer and make his plans with a well-established firm he can trust."

He leaned confidentially over me. "Look, milord Oscar . . . if by any miracle we get through this alive, you could put in a good word for me with *Her*. Make *Her* see that I'm too old for the Glory Road. I can do a lot to make your remaining days comfortable and pleasant . . . if your intentions toward me are comradely."

"Didn't we shake on it?"

"Ah, yes, so we did." He sighed. "One for all and all for one, and Pikes Peak or Bust. You're done."

It was still light and Star was in her tent when we got back—and my clothes were laid out. I started to object when I saw them but Rufo said firmly, "*She* said 'informal' and that happens to mean black tie."

I managed everything, even the studs (which were amazing big black pearls), and that tuxedo either had been tailored for me or it had been bought off the rack by

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someone who knew my height, weight, shoulders, and waist. The label inside the jacket read "The English House, Copenhagen."

But the tie whipped me. Rufo showed up while I was struggling with it, had me lie down (I didn't ask why) and tied it in a jiffy. "Do you want your watch, Oscar?"

"My watch?" So far as I knew it was in a doctor's examining room in Nice. "You have it?"

"Yes, sir. I fetched everything of yours but your"—he shuddered—"clothes."

He was not exaggerating. Everything was there, not only the contents of my pockets but the contents of my American Express deposit box: cash, passport, I.D., et cetera, even those Change Alley Sweepstake tickets.

I started to ask how he had gotten into my lock box but decided not to. He had had the key and it might have been something as simple as a fake letter of authority. Or as complex as his magical black box. I thanked him and he went back to his cooking.

I started to throw that stuff away, all but cash and passport. But one can't be a litterbug in a place as beautiful as the Singing Waters. My sword belt had a leather pouch on it; I stuffed it in there, even the watch, which had stopped.

Rufo had set up a table in front of Star's dainty tent and rigged a light from a tree over it and set candles on the table. It was dark before she came out . . . and waited. I finally realized that she was waiting for my arm. I led her to her place and seated her and Rufo seated me. He was dressed in a plum-colored footman's uniform.

The wait for Star had been worth it; she was dressed in the green gown she had offered to model for me earlier. I still don't *know* that she used cosmetics but she looked not at all like the lusty Undine who had been ducking me an hour earlier. She looked as if she should be kept under glass. She looked like Liza Doolittle at the Ball.

"Dinner in Rio" started to play, blending with the Singing Waters.

White wine with fish, rose wine with fowl, red wine with roast—Star chatted and smiled and was witty. Once Rufo, while bending over me to serve, whispered, "The condemned ate heartily." I told him to go to hell.

Champagne with the sweet and Rufo solemnly presented the bottle for my approval. I nodded. What would he have done if I had turned it down? Offered another vintage? Napoleon with coffee. And cigarettes.

I had been thinking about cigarettes all day. These were Benson & Hedges No. 5 . . . and I had been smoking those black French things to save money.

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While we were smoking, Star congratulated Rufo on the dinner and he accepted her compliments gravely and I seconded them. I still don't know who cooked that hedonistic meal. Rufo did much of it but Star may have done the hard parts while I was being shaved.

After an unhurried happy time, sitting over coffee and brandy with the overhead light doused and only a single candle gleaming on her jewels and lighting her face, Star made a slight movement back from the table and I got up quickly and showed her to her tent. She stopped at its entrance. "Milord Oscar—"

So I kissed her and followed her in—

Like hell I did! I was so damned hypnotized that I bowed over her hand and kissed it. And that was that.

That left me with nothing to do but get out of that borrowed monkey suit, hand it back to Rufo, and get a blanket from him. He had picked a spot to sleep at one side of her tent, so I picked one on the other and stretched out. It was still so pleasantly warm that even one blanket wasn't needed.

But I didn't go to sleep. The truth is, I've got a monkey on my back, a habit worse than marijuana though not as expensive as heroin. I can stiff it out and get to sleep anyway—but it wasn't helping that I could see light in Star's tent and a silhouette that was no longer troubled by a dress.

The fact is I am a compulsive reader. Thirty-five cents worth of Gold Medal Original will put me right to sleep. Or Perry Mason. But I'll read the ads in an old *Paris-Match* that has been used to wrap herring before I'll do without.

I got up and went around the tent. "*Psst!* Rufo."

"Yes, milord." He was up fast, a dagger in his hand.

"Look, is there anything to read around this dump?"

"What sort of thing?"

"Anything, just anything. Words in a row."

"Just a moment." He was gone a while, using a flashlight around that beachhead dump of plunder. He came back and offered me a book and a small camp lamp. I thanked him, went back, and lay down.

It was an interesting book, written by Albertus Magnus and apparently stolen from the British Museum. Albert offered a long list of recipes for doing unlikely things: how to pacify storms and fly over clouds, how to overcome enemies, how to make a woman be true to you—

Here's that last one: "If thou wilt that a woman bee not visious nor desire men, take the private members of a Woolfe, and the haires which doe grow on the cheekes, or the eyebrows of him,

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and the haires which bee under his beard, and burne it all, and give it to her to drinke, when she knowethe not, and she shal desire no other man."

This should annoy the "Wolfe". And if I were the gal, it would annoy me, too; it sounds like a nauseous mixture. But that's the exact formula, spelling and all, so if you are having trouble keeping her in line and have a "Woolfe" handy, try it. Let me know the results. By mail, not in person.

There were several recipes for making a woman love you who does not but a "Woolfe" was by far the simplest ingredient. Presently I put the book down and the light out and watched the moving silhouette on that translucent silk. Star was brushing her hair.

Then I quit tormenting myself and watched the stars. I've never learned the stars of the southern hemisphere; you seldom see stars in a place as wet as Southwest Asia and a man with a bump of direction doesn't need them.

But that southern sky was gorgeous.

I was staring at one very bright star or planet (it seemed to have a disk) when suddenly I realized it was moving.

I sat up. "Hey! Star!"

She called back, "Yes, Oscar?"

"Come see! A sputnik. A *big* one!"

"Coming." The light in her tent went out, she joined me quickly, and so did good old Pops Rufo, yawning and scratching his ribs. "Where, milord?" Star asked.

I pointed. "Right there! On second thought it may not be a sputnik; it might be one of our Echo series. It's awfully big and bright."

She glanced at me and looked away. Rufo said nothing. I stared at it a while longer, glanced at her. She was watching me, not it. I looked again, watched it move against the backdrop of stars.

"Star," I said, "that's not a sputnik. Nor an Echo balloon. That's a moon. A real moon."

"Yes, milord Oscar."

"Then this is not Earth."

"That is true."

"Hmm—" I looked back at the little moon, moving so fast among the stars, west to east.

Star said quietly, "You are not afraid, my hero."

"Of what?"

"Of being in a strange world."

"Seems to be a pretty nice world."

"It is," she agreed, "in many ways."

"I like it," I agreed. "But maybe it's time I knew more about it. Where are we? How many light-years, or whatever it is, in what direction?"

She sighed. "I will try, milord. But it will not be easy; you have not studied metaphysical geometry—nor many other things. Think of the pages of a book—" I still

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had that cook book of Albert the Great under my arm; she took it. "One page may resemble another very much. Or be very different. One page can be so close to another that it touches, at all points—yet have nothing to do with the page against it. We are as close to Earth—right now—as two pages in sequence in a book. And yet we are so far away that light-years cannot express it."

"Look," I said, "no need to get fancy about it. I used to watch 'Twilight Zone.' You mean another dimension. I dig it."

She looked troubled. "That's somewhat the idea but—"

Rufo interrupted. "There's still Igli in the morning."

"Yes," I agreed. "If we have to talk to Igli in the morning, maybe we need some sleep. I'm sorry. By the way, who *is* Igli?"

"You'll find out," said Rufo.

I looked up at that hurtling moon. "No doubt. Well, I'm sorry I disturbed you all with a silly mistake. Goodnight, folks."

So I crawled back into my sleeping silks, like a proper hero (all muscles and no gonads, usually), and they sacked in, too. She didn't put the light back on, so I had nothing to look at but the hurtling moons of Barsoom. I had fallen into a book.

Well, I hoped it was a success and that the writer would keep me alive for lots of sequels. It was a pretty nice deal for the hero, up to this chapter at least. There was Dejah Thoris, curled up in her sleeping silks not twenty feet away.

I thought seriously of creeping up to the flap of her tent and whispering to her that I wanted to ask a few questions about metaphysical geometry and like matters. Love spells, maybe. Or maybe just tell her that it was cold outside and could I come in?

But I didn't. Good old faithful Rufo was curled up just the other side of that tent and he had a disconcerting habit of coming awake fast with a dagger in his hand. *And* he liked to shave corpses. As I've said, given a choice, I'm chicken.

I watched the hurtling moons of Barsoom and fell asleep.

VI

SINGING BIRDS ARE BETTER than alarm clocks and Barsoom was never like this. I stretched happily and smelled coffee and wondered if there was time for a dip before breakfast. It was another perfect day, blue and clear and the sun just up, and I felt like killing dragons before lunch. Small ones, that is.

I smothered a yawn and rolled to my feet. The lovely pavilion was gone and the black box mostly repacked; it was no bigger than a piano box. Star was kneeling be-

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fore a fire, encouraging that coffee. She was a cave woman this morning, dressed in a hide that was fancy but not as fancy as her own. From an ocelot, maybe. Or from DuPont.

"Howdy, Princess," I said. "What's for breakfast? And where's your chef?"

"Breakfast later," she said. "Just a cup of coffee for you now, too hot and too black—best you be bad-tempered. Rufo is starting the talk with Igli." She served it to me in a paper cup.

I drank half a cup, burned my mouth and spat out grounds. Coffee comes in five descending stages: Coffee, Java Jamoke, Joe, and Carbon Remover. This stuff was no better than grade four.

I stopped then, having caught sight of Rufo. And company, lots of company. Along the edge of our terrace somebody had unloaded Noah's Ark. There was everything there from aardvarks to zebus, most with long yellow teeth.

Rufo was facing this picket line, ten feet this side and opposite a particularly large and uncouth citizen. About then that paper cup came apart and scalded my fingers.

"Want some more?" Star asked.

I blew on my fingers. "No, thanks. *This* is Igli?"

"Just the one in the middle that Rufo is baiting. The rest have come to see the fun, you can ignore them."

"Some of them look hungry."

"Most of the big ones are like Cuvier's devil, herbivorous. Those outsized lions would eat us—if Igli wins the argument. But only then. *Igli is the problem.*"

I looked Igli over more carefully. He resembled that scion of the man from Dundee, all chin and no forehead, and he combined the less appetizing features of giants and ogres in *The Red Fairy Book.* I never liked that book much.

He was vaguely human, using the term loosely. He was a couple of feet taller than I am and outweighed me three or four hundred pounds but I am much prettier. Hair grew on him in clumps, like a discouraged lawn; and you just knew, without being told, that he had never used a man's deodorant for manly men. The knots of his muscles had knots on them and his toenails weren't trimmed.

"Star," I said, "what's the nature of the argument we have with him?"

"You must kill him, milord."

I looked back at him. "Can't we negotiate a peaceful coexistence? Mutual inspection, cultural exchange, and so forth?"

She shook her head. "He's not bright enough for that. He's here to stop us from going down into the valley—and either he dies, or we die."

I took a deep breath. "Princess, I've reached a decision. A man

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who always obeys the law is even stupider than one who breaks it every chance. This is no time to worry about that local Sullivan Act. I want the flamethrower, a bazooka, a few grenades, and the heaviest gun in that armory. Can you show me how to dig them out?"

She poked at the fire. "My hero," she said slowly, "I'm truly sorry—but it isn't that simple. Did you notice, last night when we were smoking, that Rufo lighted our cigarettes from candles? Not using even so much as a pocket lighter?"

"Well . . . no. I didn't give it any thought."

"This rule against firearms and explosives is not a law such as you have back on Earth. It is more than that; it is impossible to use such things here. Else such things would be used against us."

"You mean they won't work?"

"They will not work. Perhaps 'hexed' is the word."

"Star. Look at me. Maybe you believe in hexes. I don't. And I'll give you seven to two that Tommy guns don't, either. I intend to find out. Will you give me a hand in unpacking?"

For the first time she looked really upset. "Oh, milord, I beg of you not to!"

"Why not?"

"Even the attempt would be disastrous. Do you believe that I know more about the hazards and dangers—and laws—of this world than you do? Will you believe me when I say that I would not have you die, that in solemn truth my own life and safety depend on yours? Please!"

It is impossible not to believe Star when she lays it on the line. I said thoughtfully, "Maybe you're right—or that character over there would be carrying a six-inch mortar as a side arm. Uh, Star, I've got a still better idea. Why don't we high-tail it back the way we came and homestead that spot where we caught the fish? In five years I'll have a nice little farm. In ten years, after the word gets around, we'll have a nice little motel, too, with a free-form swimming pool and a putting green."

She barely smiled. "Milord Oscar, there is no turning back."

"Why not? I could find it with my eyes closed."

"But *they* would find *us*. Not Igli but more like him would be sent to harry and kill us."

I sighed again. "As you say. They claim motels off the main highway are a poor risk anyhow. There's a battle axe in that duffel. Maybe I can chop his feet off before he notices me."

She shook her head again. I said, "What's the matter now? Do I have to fight him with one foot in a bucket? I thought anything that cut or stabbed—anything I did with my own muscles—was okay?"

"It is okay. But it won't work."

"Why not?"

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"Igli can't be killed. You see, he is not really alive. He is a construct, made invulnerable for this one purpose. Swords or knives or even axes will not cut him; they bounce off. I have seen it."

"You mean he is a robot?"

"Not if you are thinking of gears and wheels and printed circuits. 'Golem' would be closer. The Igli is an imitation of life." Star added, "Better than life in some ways, since there is no way—none that I know of—to kill him. But worse, too, as Igli isn't very bright nor well balanced. He has conceit without judgment. Rufo is working on that now, warming him up for you, getting him so mad he *can't* think straight."

"He is? Gosh! I must be sure to thank Rufo for that. Thank him too much. I think. Well, Princess, what am I supposed to do now?"

She spread her hands as if it were all self evident. "When you are ready, I will loose the wards—and then you will kill him."

"But you just said—" I stopped. When they abolished the French Foreign Legion very few cushy billets were left for us romantic types. Umbopa could have handled this. Conan, certainly. Or Hawk Carse. Or even Don Quixote, for that thing was about the size of a windmill. "All right, Princess, let's get on with it. Is it okay for me to spit on my hands?"

She smiled without dimpling and said gravely, "Milord Oscar, we will all spit on our hands; Rufo and I will be fighting right beside you. Either we win . . . or we all die."

We walked over and joined Rufo. He was making donkey's ears at Igli and shouting, "Who's your father, Igli? Your mother was a garbage can. Look at him! No belly button! Yaaa!"

Igli retorted, "*Your* mother barks! Your sister gives green stamps!"—but rather feebly, I thought. It was plain that that remark about belly buttons had cut him to the quick—he didn't have one. Only reasonable, I suppose.

The above is not quite what either of them said, except the remark about the belly button. I wish I could put it in the original because, in the Nevian language, the insult is a high art at least equal to poetry. In fact the epitome of literary grace is to address your enemy (publicly) in some difficult verse form, say the sestina, with every word dripping vitriol.

Rufo cackled gleefully. "Make one, Igli! Push your finger in and make one. They left you out in the rain and you ran. They forgot to finish you. Call that thing a *nose?*" He said in aside to me, in English, "How do you want him, Boss? Rare? Or well done?"

"Keep him busy while I study the matter. He doesn't understand English?"

"Not a bit."

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"Good. How close can I go to him without getting grabbed?"

"Close as you like as long as the wards are up. But, Boss—look, I'm not supposed to advise you—but when we get down to work, don't let him get you by the plums."

"I'll try not to."

"You be careful." Rufo turned his head and shouted, "Yaaa! Igli picks his nose and eats it!" He added, "*She* is a good doctor, the best, but just the same, you be careful."

"I will." I stepped closer to the invisible barrier, looked up at this creature. He glared down at me and made growling noises, so I thumbed my nose at him and gave him a wet, fruity Bronx cheer. I was down wind and it seemed likely that he hadn't had a bath in thirty or forty years; he smelled worse than a locker room at the half.

It gave me a seed of an idea. "Star, can this cherub swim?"

She looked surprised. "I really don't know."

"Maybe they forgot to program him for it. How about you, Rufo?"

Rufo looked smug. "Try me, just try me. I could teach fish. Igli. Tell us why the sow wouldn't kiss you!"

Star could swim like a seal. My style is more like a ferry boat but I get there. "Star, maybe that thing can't be killed but it breathes. It's got some sort of oxygen metabolism, even if it burns kerosene. If we held his head under water for a while—as long as necessary—I'll bet the fire would go out."

She looked wide-eyed. "Milord Oscar . . . my champion . . . I was not mistaken in you."

"It's going to take some doing. Ever play water polo, Rufo?"

"I invented it."

I hoped he had. I had played it—once. Like being ridden on a rail, it is an interesting experience—once. "Rufo, can you lure our chum down toward the bank? I take it that the barrier follows this line of furry and feathery friends? If it does, we can get him almost to that high piece of bank with the deep pool under it—you know, Star, where you ducked me the first time."

"Nothing to it," said Rufo. "We move, he'll come along."

"I'd like to get him running. Star, how long does it take you to unswitch your fence?"

"I can loose the wards in an instant, milord."

"Okay, here's the plan. Rufo, I want you to get Igli to chasing you, as fast as possible—and you cut out and head for that high bank just before you reach the stream. Star, when Rufo does that, you chop off the barrier—loose the wards—instantly. Don't wait for me to say so. Rufo, you dive in and swim like hell; don't let him grab you. With any luck, if Igli is moving fast, as big and clumsy as he is he'll go in, too, whether he

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means to or not. But I'll be pacing you, flanking you and a bit behind you. If Igli manages to put on the brakes, I'll hit him with a low tackle and knock him in. Then we all play water polo."

"Water polo I have never seen," Star said doubtfully.

"There won't be any referee. All it means this time is that all three of us jump him, in the water, and shove his head under and keep it there—and help each other to keep him from shoving *our* heads under. Big as he is, unless he can outswim us he'll be at a terrible disadvantage. We go on doing this until he is limp and stays limp, never let him get a breath. Then, to make sure, we'll weigh him down with stones—it won't matter whether he's really dead or not. Any questions?"

Rufo grinned like a gargoyle. "This is going to be fun!" Both those pessimists seemed to think that it would work, so we got started. Rufo shouted an allegation about Igli's personal habits that even Olympia Press would censor, then dared Igli to race him, offering an obscene improbability as a wager.

It took Igli a lumbering long time to get that carcass moving but when he did get rolling, he was faster than Rufo and left a wake of panicked animals and birds behind him. I'm pretty fast but I was hard pushed to hold position on the giant, flanking and a few paces back, and I hoped that Star would not loose the wards if it appeared that Igli might catch Rufo on dry land.

However, Star did loose the wards just as Rufo cut away from the barrier, and Rufo reached the bank and made a perfect racing dive without slowing down, all to plan.

But nothing else was.

I think Igli was too stupid to twig at once that the barrier was down. He kept on a few paces after Rufo had gone left oblique, then did cut left rather sharply. But he had lost speed and he didn't have any trouble stopping on dry land.

I hit him a diving tackle, illegal and low, and down he went—but *not* over into the water. And suddenly I had a double armful of struggling and very smelly golem.

But I had a wildcat helping me at once, and quickly thereafter Rufo, dripping wet, added his vote.

But it was a stalemate and one that we were bound to lose in time. Igli outweighed all of us put together and seemed to be nothing but muscle and stink and nails and teeth. We were suffering bruises, contusions, and flesh wounds—and we weren't doing Igli any damage. Oh, he screamed like a TV grunt & groaner every time one of us twisted an ear or bent back a finger, but we weren't really hurting him and he was decidedly hurting us. There wasn't a chance

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of dragging that hulk into the water.

I had started with my arms around his knees and I stayed that way, of necessity, as long as I could, while Star tried to weigh down one of his arms and Rufo the other. But the situation was fluid; Igli thrashed like a rattler with its back broken and was forever getting one limb or another free and trying to gouge and bite. It got us into odd positions and I found myself hanging onto one calloused foot, trying to twist it off, while I stared into his open mouth, wide as a bear trap and less appetizing. His teeth needed cleaning.

So I shoved the toe of his foot into his mouth.

Igli screamed, so I kept on shoving, and pretty soon he didn't have room to scream. I kept on pushing.

When he had swallowed his own left leg up to the knee, he managed to wrench his right arm loose from Star and grabbed at his disappearing leg—and I grabbed his wrist. "Help me!" I yelped to Star. *"Push!"*

She got the idea and shoved with me. That arm went into his mouth to the elbow and the leg went farther in, quite a bit of the thigh. By then Rufo was working with us and forced Igli's left hand in past his cheek and into the jaws. Igli wasn't struggling so hard by then, short on air probably, so getting the toe of his right foot started into his mouth simply required determination, with Rufo hauling back on his hairy nostrils while I bore down with a knee on his chin and Star pushed.

We kept on feeding him into his mouth, gaining an inch at a time and never letting up. He was still quivering and trying to get loose when we had him rolled up clear to his hips, and his rank armpits about to disappear.

It was like rolling a snowball in reverse; the more we pushed, the smaller he got and the more his mouth stretched—ugliest sight I ever have seen. Soon he was down to the size of a medicine ball . . . and then a soccer ball . . . then a baseball and I rolled him between my palms and kept pushing, hard.

—a golf ball, a marble, a pea . . . and finally there was nothing but some dirty grease on my hands.

Rufo took a deep breath. "I guess that'll teach him not to put his foot in his mouth with his betters. Who's ready for breakfast?"

"I want to wash my hands first," I said.

We all bathed, using plenty of soap, then Star took care of our wounds and had Rufo treat hers, under her instructions. Rufo is right; Star is the best medic. The stuff she used on us did not sting, the cuts closed up; the flexible dressing she put over them did not have to be changed, and fell off in

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time with no infection and no scars. Rufo had one very bad bite, about forty cents worth of hamburger out of his left buttock, but when Star was through with him, he could sit down and it didn't seem to bother him.

Rufo fed us little golden pancakes and big German sausages, popping with fat, and gallons of *good* coffee. It was almost noon before Star loosed the wards again and we set out for our descent down the cliff.

VII

THE DESCENT BESIDE THE great waterfall into Nevia valley is a thousand feet and more than sheer; the cliff overhangs and you go down on a line, spinning slowly like a spider. I don't advise this; it is dizzy-making and I almost lost those wonderful pancakes.

The view is stupendous. You see the waterfall from the side, free-springing, not wetting the cliff, and falling so far that it shrouds itself in mist before it hits bottom. Then as you turn you face frowning cliff, then a long look out over a valley too lush and green and beautiful to be believed —marsh and forest at the foot of the cliff, cultivated fields in middle distance a few miles away, then far beyond and hazy at the base but sharp at the peaks a mighty wall of snow-covered mountains.

Star had sketched the valley for me. "First we fight our way through the marsh. After that it is easy going—we simply have to look sharp for blood kites. Because we come to a brick road, very nice."

"A yellow brick road?" I asked.

"Yes. That's the clay they have. Does it matter?"

"I guess not. Just don't make a hobbit of it. Then what?"

"After that we'll stop overnight with a family, the squire of the countryside there. Good people, you'll enjoy them."

"And then the going gets tough," Rufo added.

"Rufo, don't borrow trouble!" Star scolded. "You will please refrain from comments and allow Oscar to cope with his problems as he comes to them, rested, clear-eyed, and unworried. Do you know anyone else who could have handled Igli?"

"Well, since you put it that way . . . no."

"I do put it that way. We will sleep in comfort tonight. Isn't that enough? You'll enjoy it as much as anyone."

"So will you."

"When did I ever fail to enjoy anything? Hold your tongue. Now, Oscar, at the foot of the cliff are the Horned Ghosts—no way to avoid them, they'll see us coming down. With luck we won't see any of the Cold Water Gang; they stay back in the mists. But if we have the bad luck to encounter

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both, we may have the good luck that they will fight each other and let us slip away. The path through the marsh is tricky; you had best study this sketch until you know it. Solid footing is only where little yellow flowers grow no matter how solid and dry a piece looks. But, as you can see, even if you stay carefully on the safe bits, there are so many side trails and dead ends that we could wander all day and be trapped by darkness —and never get out."

So here I was, coming down first, because the Horned Ghosts would be waiting at the bottom. My privilege. Wasn't I a "Hero"? Hadn't I made Igli swallow himself?

But I wished that the Horned Ghosts really were ghosts. They were two-legged animals, omnivorous. They ate anything, including each other, and especially travelers. From the belly up they were described to me as much like the Minotaur; from there down they were splay-footed satyrs. Their upper limbs were short arms but without real hands—no thumbs.

But on those horns! They had horns like Texas long horns, but sticking up and forward.

However there is one way of converting a Horned Ghost into a real ghost. It has a soft place on its skull, like a baby's soft spot, between those horns. Since the brute charges head down, attempting to impale you, this is the only vulnerable spot that can be reached. All it takes is to stand your ground, don't flinch, aim for that one little spot and hit it.

So my task was simple. Go down first, kill as many as necessary to insure that Star would have a safe spot to land, then stand fast and protect her until Rufo was down. After that we were free to carve our way through the marsh to safety. If the Cold Water Gang didn't join the party—

I tried to ease my position in the sling I was riding—my left leg had gone to sleep—and looked down. A hundred feet below the reception committee had gathered.

It looked like an asparagus patch. Of bayonets.

I signaled to stop lowering. Far above me, Rufo checked the line; I hung there, swaying, and tried to think. If I had them lower me straight into that mob, I might stick one or two before I myself was impaled. Or maybe none—The only certainty was that I would be dead long before my friends could join me.

On the other hand, besides that soft spot between the horns, each of these geeks had a soft underbelly, just made for arrows. If Rufo would lower me a bit—

I signaled to him. I started slowly down, a bit jerkily, and he almost missed my signal to stop again. I had to pull up my feet; some of those babies were a-snort-

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ing and a-ramping around and shoving each other for a chance to gore me. One Nijinsky among them did manage to scrape the sole of my left buskin, giving me goose flesh clear to my chin.

Under that strong inducement I pulled myself hand over hand up the line far enough to let me get feet into the sling instead of my fanny. I stood in it, hanging onto the line and standing on one foot and then on the other to work pins and needles out. Then I unslung my bow and strung it. This feat would have been worthy of a trained acrobat—but have you ever tried to bend a bow and let fly while standing in a bight at one end of a thousand-foot line and clinging to the line with one hand?

You lose arrows that way. I lost three and almost lost me.

I tried buckling my belt around the line. That caused me to hang upside down and lost me my Robin Hood hat and more arrows. My audience liked that one; they applauded—I think it was applause—so, for an encore, I tried to shift the belt up around my chest to enable me to hang more or less straight down—and maybe get off an arrow or two.

I didn't quite lose my sword.

So far, my only results had been to attract customers ("Mama, see the funny man!") and to make myself swing back and forth like a pendulum.

Bad as the latter was, it did give me an idea. I started increasing that swing, pumping it up like a playground swing. This was slow work and it took a while to get the hang of it, as the period of that pendulum of which I was the weight was over a minute—and it does no good to try to hurry a pendulum; you have to work with it, not against it. I hoped my friends could see well enough to guess what I was doing and not foul it up.

After an unreasonably long time I was swinging back and forth in a flattish arc about a hundred feet long, passing very fast over the heads of my audience at the bottom of each swing, slowing to a stop at the end of each swing. At first those spike heads tried to move with me, but they tired of that and squatted near the midpoint and watched, their heads moving as I swung, like spectators of a slow-motion tennis match.

But there is always some confounded innovator. My notion was to drop off at one end of this arc where it just missed the cliff and make a stand there with my back to the wall. The ground was higher there, I would not have so far to drop. But one of those horned horrors figured it out and trotted over to that end of the swing. He was followed by two or three more.

That settled it; I would have to drop off at the other end. But

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young Archimedes figured that out, too. He left his buddies at the cliff face and trotted after me. I pulled ahead of him at the low point of the swing—but slowed down and he caught up with me long before I reached the dead point at the end. He had only a hundred feet to do in about thirty seconds—a slow walk. He was under me when I got there.

The odds wouldn't improve; I kicked my feet clear, hung by one hand and drew sword during that too-slow traverse, and dropped off anyway. My notion was to spit that tender spot on his head before my feet touched ground.

Instead, I missed and he missed and I knocked him sprawling and sprawled right after him and rolled to my feet and ran for the cliff face nearest me, poking that genius in his belly with my sword without stopping.

That foul blow saved me. His friends and relatives stopped to quarrel over who got the prime ribs before a clot of them moved in my direction. This gave me time to set my feet on a pile of scree at the base of the cliff, where I could play "King of the Castle," and return my sword and nock an arrow.

I didn't wait for them to rush me. I simply waited until they were close enough that I could not miss, took a bead on the wishbone of the old bull who was leading them, if he had a wishbone, and let that shaft go.

It passed through him and stuck into one behind him.

This led to another quarrel over the price of chops. They ate them, teeth and toenails. That was their weakness: all appetite and too little brain. If they had cooperated, they could have had me in one rush when I first hit the ground. Instead they stopped for lunch.

I glanced up. High above me, Star was a tiny spider on a thread; she grew rapidly larger. I moved crabwise along the wall until I was opposite the point, forty feet from the cliff, where she would touch ground.

When she was about fifty feet up, she signaled Rufo to stop lowering, drew her sword and saluted me. "Magnificent, my Hero!" We were all wearing swords; Star had chosen a dueling sword with a 34" blade—a big sword for a woman but Star is a big woman. She had also packed her belt pouch with medic's supplies, an ominous touch had I noticed, but did not, at the time.

I drew and returned her salute. They were not bothering me yet, although some, having finished lunch or having been crowded out, were milling around and looking me over. Then I sheathed again, and nocked an arrow. "Start pumping it up, Star, right toward me. Have Rufo lower you a bit more."

She returned sword and sig-

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naled Rufo. He let her down slowly until she was about nine feet off the ground, where she signaled a stop. "Now pump it up!" I called out. Those bloodthirsty natives had forgotten me; they were watching Star, those not still busy eating Cousin Abbie or Greatuncle John.

"All right," she answered. "But I have a throwing line. Can you catch it?"

"Oh!" The smart darling had watched my maneuvers and had figured out what would be needed. "Hold it a moment! I'll make a diversion." I reached over my shoulder, counted arrows by touch—seven. I had started with twenty and made use of one; the rest were scattered, lost.

I used three in a hurry, right, left, and ahead, picking targets as far away as I dared risk, aiming at midpoint and depending on that wonderful bow to take those shafts straight and flat. Sure enough, the crowd went for fresh meat like a government handout. "Now!"

Ten seconds later I caught her in my arms and collected a split-second kiss for toll.

Ten minutes later Rufo was down by the same tactics, at a cost of three of my arrows and two of Star's smaller ones. He had to lower himself, sitting in the bight and checking the free end of the line under both armpits; he would have been a sitting duck without help. As soon as he was untangled from the line, he started jerking it down off the cliff, and faking it into a coil.

"Leave that!" Star said sharply. "We haven't time and it's too heavy to carry."

"I'll put it in the pack."

"No."

"It's a good line," Rufo persisted. "We'll need it."

"You'll need a shroud if we're not through the marsh by nightfall." Star turned to me. "How shall we march, milord?"

I looked around. In front of us and to the left a few jokers still milled around, apparently hesitant about getting closer. To our right and above us the great cloud at the base of the falls made iridescent lace in the sky. About three hundred yards in front of us was where we would enter the trees and just beyond the marsh started.

We went down hill in a tight wedge, myself on point, Rufo and Star following on flank, all of us with arrows nocked. I had told them to draw swords if any Horned Ghost got within fifty feet.

None did. One idiot came straight toward us, alone, and Rufo knocked him over with an arrow at twice that distance. As we came up on the corpse Rufo drew his dagger. "Let it be!" said Star. She seemed edgy.

"I'm just going to get the nuggets and give them to Oscar."

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"And get us all killed. If Oscar wants nuggets, he shall have them."

"What sort of nuggets?" I asked, without stopping.

"Gold, Boss. Those blighters have gizzards like a chicken. But gold is all they swallow for it. Old ones yield maybe twenty, thirty pounds."

I whistled.

"Gold is common here," Star explained. "There is a great heap of it at the base of the falls, inside the cloud, washed down over eons. It causes fights between the Ghosts and the Cold Water Gang, because the Ghosts have this odd appetitite and sometimes risk entering the cloud to satisfy it."

"I haven't seen any of the Cold Water Gang yet," I commented.

"Pray God you don't," Rufo answered.

"All the more reason to get deep into the marsh," Star added. "The Gang doesn't go into it and even the Ghosts don't go far in. Despite their splay feet, they can be sucked under."

"Anything dangerous in the swamp itself?"

"Plenty," Rufo told me. "So be sure you step on the yellow flowers."

"Watch where you put your own feet. If that map was right, I won't lose us. What does a Cold Water Gangster look like?"

Rufo said thoughtfully, "Ever seen a man who had been drowned for a week?" I let the matter drop.

Before we got to the trees I had us sling bows and draw swords. Just inside the cover of trees, they jumped us. Horned Ghosts, I mean, not the Cold Water Gang. An ambush from all sides, I don't know how many. Rufo killed four or five and Star at least two and I danced around, looking active and trying to survive.

We had to climb up and over bodies to move on, too many to count.

We kept on into the swamp following the little golden pathfinder flowers and the twists and turns of the map in my head. In about half an hour we came to a clearing, big as a double garage. Star said faintly, "This is far enough." She had been holding one hand pressed to her side but had not been willing to stop until then, although blood stained her tunic and all down the left leg of her tights.

She let Rufo attend her first while I guarded the bottleneck into the clearing. I was relieved not to be asked to help, as, after we gently removed her tunic, I felt sick at seeing how badly she had been gored—and never a peep out of her. That golden body—hurt!

As a knight errant, I felt like a slob.

But she was chipper again, once Rufo had followed her instructions. She treated Rufo, then treated me—half a dozen wounds

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each but scratches compared with the rough one she had taken.

Once she had me patched up she said, "Milord Oscar, how long will it be until we are out of the marsh?"

I ran through it in my head. "Does the going get any worse?"

"Slightly better."

"Not over an hour."

"Good. Don't put those filthy clothes back on. Rufo, unpack a bit and we'll have clean clothes and more arrows. Oscar, we'll need them for the blood kites, once we are out of the trees."

The little black box filled most of the clearing before it was unfolded enough to let Rufo get out clothes and reach the arsenal. But clean clothes and full quiver made me feel like a new man, especially after Rufo dug out a half liter of brandy and we split it three ways, gurgle-gurgle! Star replenished her medic's pouch, then I helped Oscar fold up the luggage.

Maybe Rufo was giddy from brandy and no lunch. Or perhaps from loss of blood. It could have been just the bad luck of an unnoticed patch of slippery mud. He had the box in his arms, about to make the last closure that would fold it to knapsack size, when he slipped, recovered violently, and the box sailed out of his arms into a chocolate-brown pool.

It was far out of reach. I yelled, "Rufo, off with your belt!" I was reaching for the buckle of mine.

"No, no!" screamed Rufo. "Stand back! Get clear!"

A corner of the box was still in sight. With a safety line on me I *knew* I could get it, even if there was no bottom to the pool. I said so, angrily.

"No, Oscar!" Star said urgently. "He's right. We march. Quickly."

So we marched—me leading, Star breathing on my neck, Rufo crowding her heels.

We had gone a hundred yards when there was a mud volcano behind us. Not much noise, just a bass rumble and a slight earthquake, then some very dirty rain. Star quit hurrying and said pleasantly, "Well, that's that."

Rufo said, "And all the liquor was in it!"

"I don't mind that," Star answered. "Liquor is everywhere. But I had new clothes in there, pretty ones, Oscar. I bought them with you in mind."

I didn't answer. I was thinking about a flamethrower and an M-1 and a couple of cases of ammo. And the liquor, of course.

"Did you hear me, milord?" she persisted. "I wanted to wear them for you."

"Princess," I answered, "you have your prettiest clothes right with you, always."

I heard the happy chuckle that goes with her dimples. "I'm sure that you have often said that before. And no doubt with great success.

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We were out of the swamp long before dark and hit the brick road soon after. Blood kites are no problem. They are such murderous things that if you shoot an arrow in the direction of one of their dives, a kite would swerve and pluck it out of the air, getting the shaft right down its gullet. We usually recovered the arrows.

We were among ploughed fields soon after we reached the road and soon the blood kites thinned out. Just at sundown we could see outbuildings and the lights in the manor where Star said that we would spend the night.

VIII

Milord Doral 't Giuk Dorali should have been a Texan. I don't mean that the Doral could have been mistaken for a Texan but he had that you-paid-for-the-lunch-I'll-pay-for-the-Cadillacs expansiveness.

His farmhouse was the size of a circus tent and as lavish as a Thanksgiving dinner—rich, sumptuous, fine carvings and inlaid jewels. Nevertheless it had a sloppy, lived-in look and if you didn't watch where you put your feet, you would step on a child's toy on a broad, sweeping staircase and wind up with a broken collar bone. There were children and dogs underfoot everywhere and the youngest of each weren't housebroken. It didn't worry the Doral. Nothing worried the Doral, he enjoyed life.

We had been passing through his fields for miles (rich as the best Iowa farmland and no winters; Star told me they produced four crops a year)—but it was late in the day and an occasional field hand was all we saw save for one wagon we met on the road. I thought that it was pulled by a team of two pairs of horses. I was mistaken, the team was but one pair and the animals were not horses, they had eight legs each.

All of Nevia valley is like that, the commonplace mixed with the wildly different. Humans were humans, dogs were dogs—but horses weren't horses. Like Alice trying to cope with the Flamingo, every time I thought I had it licked, it would wiggle loose.

The man driving those equine centipedes stared but not because we were dressed oddly; he was dressed as I was. He was staring at Star, as who wouldn't? The people working in fields had mostly been dressed in sort of a lava-lava. This garment, a simple wrap-around tied off at the waist, is the equivalent in Nevia of overalls or blue jeans for both men and women; what we were wearing was equal to the Grey Flannel Suit or to a woman's basic black. Party or formal clothes—well, that's another matter.

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As we turned into the grounds of the manor we picked up a wake of children and dogs. One kid ran ahead and, when we reached the broad terrace in front of the main house, milord Doral himself came out the great front door. I didn't pick him for lord of the manor; he was wearing one of those short sarongs, was barefooted and bareheaded. He had thick hair, shot with grey, an imposing beard, and looked like General U. S. Grant.

Star waved and called out, "Jock! Oh, Jocko!" (The name was "Giuk," but I caught it as "Jock" and Jock he is.)

The Doral stared at us, then lumbered forward like a tank, "Ettyboo! Bless your beautiful blue eyes! Bless your bouncy little bottom! Why didn't you let me *know?*" (I have to launder this because Nevian idioms don't parallel ours. Try translating certain French idioms literally into English and you'll see what I mean. The Doral was not being vulgar; he was being formally and gallantly polite to an old and highly respected friend.)

He grabbed Star in a hug, lifted her off her feet, kissed her on both cheeks and on the mouth, gnawed one ear, then set her down with an arm around her. "Games and celebrations! Three months of holiday! Races and rassling every day, orgies every night! Prizes for the strongest, the fairest, the wittiest—"

Star stopped him. "Milord Doral—"

"Eh? And a prize of all prizes for the first baby born—"

"Jocko darling! I love you dearly but tomorrow we must ride. All we ask is a bone to gnaw and a corner to sleep in."

"Nonsense! You can't do this to me."

"You know that I must."

"Politics be damned! I'll die at your feet, Sugar Pie. Poor old Jocko's heart will stop. I feel an attack coming right now." He felt around his chest. "Someplace here —"

She poked him in the belly. "You old fraud. You'll die as you've lived, and not of heartbreak. Milord Doral—"

"Yes, Milady?"

"I bring you a Hero."

He blinked. "You're not talking about Rufo? Hi, Rufe, you old polecat! Heard any good ones lately? Get back to the kitchen and pick yourself a lively one."

"Thank you, milord Doral." Rufo "made a leg," bowing deeply, and left us.

Star said firmly, "If the Doral please."

"I hear."

Star untangled his arm, stood straight and tall and started to chant:

"By the Singing Laughing Waters
Came a Hero Fair and Fearless.

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Oscar hight this noble warrior,
Wise and Strong and never daunted,
Trapped the Igli with a question,
Caught him out with paradoxes,
Shut the Igli's mouth with Igli.
Fed him to him, feet and fingers!
Nevermore the Singing Waters —"

It went on and on, none of it lies yet none of it quite true—colored like a press agent's handout. For example Star told him that I had killed twenty-seven Horned Ghosts, one with my bare hands. I don't remember that many and as for "bare hands," that was an accident. I had just stabbed one of those vermin as another one tumbled at my feet, shoved from behind. I didn't have time to get my sword clear, so I set a foot on one horn and pulled hard on the other with my left hand and his head came apart like snapping a wishbone. But I had done it from desperation, not choice.

Star even ad-libbed a long excursus about my father's heroism and alleged that my Grandaddy had led the charge at San Juan Hill and then started in on my great-grandfathers. But when she told him how I had picked up that scar that runs from left eye to right jaw, she pulled out all the stops.

Now look, Star had quizzed me the first time I met her and she had encouraged me to tell her more during that long hike the day before. But I did *not* give her most of the guff she was handing the Doral. She must have had the Sûreté, the F.B.I., the Archie Goodwin on me for months. She even named the team we had played against when I busted my nose and I never told her *that*.

I stood there blushing while the Doral looked me up and down with whistles and snorts of appreciation. When Star ended, with a simple: "Thus it happened," he let out a long sigh and said, "Could we have that part about Igli over again?"

Star complied, chanting different words and more detail. The Doral listened, frowning and nodding approval. "A heroic solution," he said. "So he's a mathematician, too. Where did he study?"

"A natural genius, Jock."

"It figures." He stepped up to me, looked me in the eye and put his hands on my shoulders. "The Hero who confounds Igli may choose any house. But will he honor my home by accepting hospitality of roof . . . and table . . . and bed?"

He spoke with great earnestness, holding my eye; I had no chance to look at Star for a hint. And I wanted a hint. The person who says smugly that good manners are the same everywhere and

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people are just people hasn't been farther out of Podunk than the next whistle stop. I'm no sophisticate but I had been around enough to learn that. It was a formal speech, stuffed with protocol, and called for a formal answer.

I did the best I could. I put my hands on his shoulders and answered solemnly, "I am honored far beyond any merit of mine, sir."

"But you accept?" he said anxiously.

"I accept with all my heart." ("Heart" is close enough. I was having trouble with language.)

He seemed to sigh with relief. "Glorious!" He grabbed me in a bear hug, kissed me on both cheeks, and only some fast dodging kept me from being kissed on the mouth.

Then he straightened up and shouted. "Wine! Beer! Schnaps! Who the dadratted tomfollery is supposed to be chasing? I'll skin somebody alive with a rusty file! Chairs! Service for a Hero! Where *is* everybody?"

That last was uncalled for; while Star was reciting what a great guy I am, some eighteen or fifty people had gathered on the terrace, pushing and shoving and trying to get a better look. Among them must have been the personnel with the day's duty because a mug of ale was shoved into my hand and a four-ounce glass of 110-proof firewater into the other before the boss stopped yelling. Jocko drank boilermaker style, so I followed suit, then was happy to sit down on a chair that was already behind me, with my teeth loosened, my scalp lifted, and the beer just starting to put out the fire.

Other people plied me with bits of cheese, cold meats, pickled this and that, and unidentified drinking food all tasty, not waiting for me to accept it but shoving it into my mouth if I opened it even to say "Gesundheit!" I ate as offered and soon it blotted up the hydrofluoric acid.

In the meantime the Doral was presenting his household to me. It would have been better had they worn chevrons because I never did get them straightened out as to rank. Clothes didn't help because, just as the squire was dressed like a field hand, the second scullery maid might (and sometimes did) duck back in and load herself with golden ornaments and her best party dress. Nor were they presented in order of rank.

I barely twigged as to which was the lady of the manor, Jocko's wife—his senior wife. She was a very comely older woman, a brunette carrying a few pounds extra but with that dividend most fetchingly distributed. She was dressed as casually as Jocko but, fortunately, I noticed her because she went at once to greet Star and they embraced warmly, two old

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friends. So I had my ears spread when she was presented to me a moment later—as (and I caught it) *the* Doral (just as Jocko was *the* Doral) but with the feminine ending.

I jumped to my feet, grabbed her hand, bowed over it and pressed it to my lips. This isn't even faintly a Nevian custom but it brought cheers and Mrs. Doral blushed and looked pleased and Jocko grinned proudly.

She was the only one I stood up for. Each of the men and boys made a leg to me, with a bow; all the girls from six to sixty curtsied —not as we know it, but Nevian style. It looked more like a step of the Twist. Balance on one foot and lean back as far as possible, then balance on the other while leaning forward, all the while undulating alowly. This doesn't sound graceful but it is, and it proved that there was not a case of arthritis nor a slipped disk anywhere on the Doral spread.

Jocko hardly ever bothered with names. The females were "Sweetheart" and "Honeylamb" and "Pretty Puss" and he called all the males, even those who seemed to be older than he was, "Son."

Possibly most of them were his sons. The setup in Nevia I don't fully understand. This looked like a feudalism out of our own history —and maybe it was—but whether this mob was the Doral's slaves, his serfs, his hired hands, or all members of one big family I never got straight. A mixture, I think. Titles didn't mean anything. The only title Jocko held was that he was singled out by a grammatical inflection as being *the* Doral instead of just any of a couple of hundred Dorals. I've scattered the tag "milord" here and there in this memoir because Star and Rufo used it, but it was simply a courteous form of addressing paralleling one in Nevian. "Freiherr" does not mean "free man," and "monsieur" does not mean "my lord"—these things don't translate well. Star sprinkled her speech with "milords" because she was much too polite to say, "Hey, Mac!" even with her intimates.

(The very politest endearments in Nevian would win you a clout in the teeth in the USA.)

Once all hands had been presented to the Gordon, Hero First Class, we adjourned to get ready for the banquet that Jocko, cheated of his three months of revelry, had swapped for his first intention. It split me off from Star as well as from Rufo; I was escorted to my chamber by my two valettes.

That's what I said. Female. Plural. It is a good thing that I had become relaxed to female attendants in men's washrooms, European style, and still more relaxed by Southeast Asia and l'Île du Levant they don't teach you how to cope with valettes in American public schools. Especially

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when they are young and cute and terribly anxious to please . . . and I had had a long, dangerous day. I learned, first time out on patrol, that nothing hikes up that old biological urge like being shot at and living through it.

If there had been only one, I might have been late to dinner. As it was, they chaperoned each other, though not intentionally, I believe. I patted the redhead on her fanny when the other one wasn't looking and reached, I thought, an understanding for a later time.

Well, having your back scrubbed is fun, too. Shorn, shampooed, shined, shaved, showered, smelling like a belligerent rose, decked out in the fanciest finery since Cecil B. deMille rewrote the Bible, I was delivered by them to the banquet hall on time.

But the proconsul's dress uniform I wore was a suit of fatigues compared with Star's getup. She had lost all her pretty clothes earlier in the day but our hostess had been able to dig up something.

First a dress that covered Star from chin to ankle—like plate glass. It seemed to be blue smoke, it clung to her and billowed out behind. Underneath was "underwear." She appeared to be wrapped in twining ivy—but this ivy was gold, picked out in sapphires. It curved across her beautiful belly, divided into strands and cupped her breasts, the coverage being about like a bikini minimum but more startling and much more effective.

Her shoes were sandals in an S-curve of something transparent and springy. Nothing appeared to hold them on, no straps, no clips; her lovely feet, bare, rested on them. It made her appear as if she were on tiptoe about four inches off the floor.

Her great mane of blonde hair was built up into a structure as complex as a full-rigged ship, and studded with sapphires. She was wearing a fortune or two of sapphires here and there on her body, too; I won't itemize.

She spotted me just as I caught sight of her. Her face lit up and she called out, in English, "My Hero, you are *beautiful!*"

I said, "Uh—"

Then I added, "You haven't been wasting your time, either. Do I sit with you? I'll need coaching."

"No, no! You sit with the gentlemen, I sit with the ladies. You won't have any trouble."

This is not a bad way to arrange a banquet. We each had separate low tables, the men in a row facing the ladies, with about fifteen feet between them. It wasn't necessary to make chitchat with the ladies and they all were worth looking at. The Lady Doral was opposite me and was giving Star a run for the Golden Apple. Her costume was opaque some places but not the usual places.

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Most of it was diamonds. I believe they were diamonds; I don't think they make rhinestones that big.

About twenty were seated; two or three times that many were serving, entertaining, or milling around. Three girls did nothing but see to it that I did not starve nor die of thirst—I didn't have to learn how to use their table tools; I never touched them. The girls knelt by me; I sat on a big cushion. Later in the evening Jocko lay flat on his back with his head in a lap so that his maids could pop food into his mouth or hold a cup to his lips.

Jocko had three maids as I did; Star and Mrs. Jocko had two each; the rest struggled along with one apiece. These serving maids illustrate why I had trouble telling the players without a program. My hostess and my Princess were dressed fit to kill, sure—but one of my flunkies, a 16-yr-old strong contender for Miss Nevia, was dressed only in jewelry but so much of it that she was more "modestly" dressed than Star or Doral Letva, the Lady Doral.

Nor did they act like servants except for their impassioned determination to see that I got drunk and stuffed. They chattered among themselves in teenage argot and made wisecracks about how big my muscles were, etc., as if I had not been present. Apparently heroes are not expected to talk, for every time I opened my mouth something went into it.

There was always something doing—dancers, jugglers, recitations of poetry, in the space between the tables. Kids wandered around and grabbed tidbits from platters before they reached the tables. One little doll about three years old squatted down in front of me, all big eyes and open mouth, and stared, letting dancers avoid her as best they could. I tried to get her to come to me, but she just stared and played with her toes.

A damsel with a dulcimer strolled among the tables, singing and playing. It could have been a dulcimer, she might have been a damsel.

About two hours along in the feast, Jocko stood up, roared for silence, belched loudly, shook off maids who were trying to steady him, and started to recite.

Same verse, different tune—he was reciting my exploits. I would have thought that he was too drunk to recite a limerick but he sounded off endlessly, in perfect scansion with complex inner rhymes and rippling alliterations, an astounding feat of virtuosity in rhetoric.

He stuck to Star's story line but embroidered it. I listened with growing admiration, both for him as a poet and for good old Scar Gordon, the one-man army. I decided that I must be a purty god-

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dam hot hero, so when he sat down, I stood up.

The girls had been more successful in getting me drunk than in getting me fed. Most of the food was strange and it was usually tasty. But a cold dish had been fetched in, little froglike creatures in ice, served whole. You dipped them in a sauce and took them in two bites.

The gal in the jewels grabbed one, dipped it and put it up for me to bite. And it woke up.

This little fellow—call him "Elmer"—Elmer rolled his eyes and *looked* at me, just as I was about to bite him.

I suddenly wasn't hungry and jerked my head back.

Miss Jewelry Shop laughed heartily, dipped him again, and showed me how to do it. No more Elmer—

I didn't eat for quite a while and drank more than too much. Every time a bite was offered me I would see Elmer's feet disappearing, and gulp, and have another drink.

That's why I stood up.

Once up, there was dead silence. The music stopped because the musicians were waiting to see what to improvise as background to my poem.

I suddenly realized that I didn't have anything to say.

Not anything. There wasn't a prayer that I could ad-lib a poem of thanks, a graceful compliment to my host—in Nevian. Hell, I couldn't have done it in English.

Star's eyes were on me. She looked gravely confident.

That did it. I didn't risk Nevian; I couldn't even remember how to ask my way to the men's room. So I gave it to 'em, both barrels, in English. Vachel Lindsay's *Congo*.

As much of it as I could remember, say about four pages. What I did give them was that compelling rhythm and rhyme scheme, double-talking and faking on any fluffs and really slamming it on "beating on a table with the handle of a broom! Boom! Boom! Boomlay boom!" and the orchestra caught the spirit and we rattled the dishes.

The applause was wonderful and Miss Tiffany grabbed my ankle and kissed it.

So I gave them Mr. E. A. Poe's *Bells* for dessert. Jocko kissed me on my left eye and slobbered on my shoulder.

Then Star stood up and explained, in scansion and rhyme, that in my own land, in my own language, among my own people, warriors and artists all, I was as famous a poet as I was a hero (which was true. Zero equals zero), and that I had done them the honor of composing my greatest work, in the jewels of my native tongue, a fitting thanks to the Doral and house Doral for hospitality of roof, of table, of bed—

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and that she would, in time, do her poor best to render my music into their language.

Between us we got the Oscar.

Then they brought in the pièce de resistance, a carcass roasted whole and carried by four men. From the size and shape it might have been roast peasant under glass. But it was dead and it smelled wonderful and I ate a lot of it and sobered up. After the roast there were only eight or nine other things, soups and sherbets and similar shilly-shallying. The party got looser and people didn't stay at their own tables. One of my girls feel asleep and spilled my wine cup and about then I realized that most of the crowd had gone.

Doral Letva, flanked by two girls, led me to my chambers and put me to bed. They dimmed the lights and withdrew while I was still trying to phrase a gallant goodnight in their language.

They came back, having shucked all jewelry and other encumbrances and posed at my bedside, the Three Graces. I had decided that the younger ones were mama's daughters. The older girl was maybe eighteen, full ripe, and a picture of what mama must have been at that age; the younger one seemed five years younger, barely nubile, as pretty for her own age and quite self conscious. She blushed and dropped her eyes when I looked at her. But her sister stared back with sultry eyes, boldly provocative.

Their mother, an arm around each waist, explained simply but in rhyme that I had honored their roof and their table—and now their bed. What was a Hero's pleasure? One? Or two? Or all three?

I'm chicken. We know that. If it hadn't been that little sister was about the size of the little brown sisters who had scared me in the past, maybe I could have shown aplomb.

But, hell, those doors didn't close. Just arches. And Jocko me bucko might wake up anytime; I didn't know where he was. I won't say I've never bedded a married woman nor a man's daughter in his own house—but I've followed American cover-up conventions in such matters. This flat-footed proposition scared me worse than the Horned Goats. I mean 'Ghosts."

I struggled to put my decision in poetic language.

I didn't manage it but I put over the idea of negative.

The little girl started to bawl and fled. Her sister looked daggers, snorted, *"Hero!"* and went after her. Mama just looked at me and left.

She came back in about two minutes. She spoke very formally, obviously exercising great control, and prayed to know if any woman in this house had met with the Hero's favor? Her name, please?

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Or could I describe her? Or would I have them paraded so that I might point her out?

I did my best to explain that, were a choice to be made, she herself would be my choice—but that I was tired and wished to sleep alone.

Letva blinked back tears, wished me a hero's rest, and left a second time, even faster. For an instant I thought she was going to slap me.

Five seconds later I got up and tried to catch her. But she was gone, the gallery was dark.

I fell asleep and dreamt about the Cold Water Gang. They were even uglier than Rufo had suggested and they were trying to make me eat big gold nuggets, all with the eyes of Elmer.

IX

RUFO SHOOK ME AWAKE. "Boss! Get up! Right now!"

I buried my head in covers. "Go 'way!" My mouth tasted of spoiled cabbage, my head buzzed, and my ears were on crooked.

"Right *now! She* says so."

I got up. Rufo was dressed in our Merry Men clothes and wearing sword, so I dressed the same way and buckled on mine. My valettes were not in sight, nor my borrowed finery. I stumbled after Rufo into the great dining hall. There was Star, dressed to travel, and looking grim. The fancy furnishings of the night before were gone; it was as bleak as an abandoned barn. A barn table was all, and on it a joint of meat, cold in congealed grease, and a knife beside it.

I looked at it without relish. "What's that?"

"Your breakfast, if you want it. But *I* shall not stay under this roof and eat cold shoulder." It was a tone, a manner, I had never heard from her.

Rufo touched my sleeve. "Boss. Let's get out of here. Now."

So we did. Not a soul was in sight, indoors or out, not even children or dogs. But three dashing steeds were waiting. Those eight-legged tandem ponies, I mean, the horse version of a dachshund, saddled and ready to go. The saddle rigs were complex; each pair of legs had a leather yoke over it and the load was distributed by poles flexing laterally, one on each side, and mounted on this was a chair with a back, a padded seat, and arm rests. A tiller rope ran to each armrest.

A lever on the left was both brake and accelerator and I hate to say how suggestions were conveyed to the beast. However, the "horses" didn't seem to mind.

They weren't horses. Their heads were slightly equine but they had pads rather than hooves and were omnivores, not hayburners. But you grow to like these beasties.

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Mine was black with white points —beautiful. I named her "Ars Longa." She had soulful eyes.

Rufo lashed my bow and quiver to a baggage rack behind my chair and showed me how to get aboard, adjust my seat belt, and get comfortable with feet on foot rests rather than stirrups and my back supported—as comfy as first-class seats in an airliner. We took off fast and hit a steady pace of ten miles an hour, single-footing (the only gait longhorses have) but smoothed by that eight-point suspension so that it was like a car on a gravel road.

Star rode ahead, she hadn't spoken another word. I tried to speak to her but Rufo touched my arm. "Boss, don't," he said quetly. "When *She* is like this, all you can do is wait."

Once we were underway, Rufo and I knee to knee and Star out of earshot ahead, I said, "Rufo, what in the world happened?"

He frowned." We'll never know. *She* and the Doral had a row, that's clear. But best we pretend it never happened."

He shut up and so did I. Had Jocko been obnoxious to Star? Drunk he certainly was and amorous he might have been. But I couldn't visualize Star not being able to handle a man so as to avoid rape without hurting his feelings.

That led to further grim thoughts. If the older sister had come in alone— If Miss Tiffany hadn't passed out— If my valette with the fiery hair had showed up to undress me as I had understood she would— Oh, hell!

Presently Rufo eased his seat belt, lowered his back rest and raised his foot rests to reclining position, covered his face with a kerchief and started to snore. After a while I did the same; it had been a short night, no breakfast, and I had a kingsize hangover. My "horse" didn't need my help; the two held position on Star's mount.

When I woke I felt better, aside from hunger and thirst. Rufo was still sleeping; Star's steed was still fifty paces ahead. The countryside was still lush, and ahead perhaps a half mile was a house—not a lordly manor but a farm house. I could see a well sweep and thought of moss-covered buckets, cool and wet and reeking of typhoid—well, I had had my booster shots in Heidelberg; I wanted a drink. Water, I mean. Better yet, beer—they made fine beer hereabouts.

Rufo yawned, put away his kerchief, and raised his seat. "Must have dozed off," he said with a silly grin.

"Rufo, you see that house?"

"Yes. What about it?"

"Lunch, that's what. I've gone far enough on an empty stomach. And I'm so thirsty that I could squeeze a stone and drink the whey from it."

"Then best you do so."

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"Huh?"

"Milord, I'm sorry—I'm thirsty, too—but we aren't stopping there. *She* wouldn't like it."

"She wouldn't, eh? Rufo, let me set you straight. Just because milady Star is in a pet is no reason for me to ride all day with no food nor water. You do as you see fit; I'm stopping for lunch. Uh, do you have any money on you? Local money?"

He shook his head. "You don't do it that way, not here. Boss. Wait another hour. Please."

"Why?"

"Because we are still on the Doral's land, that's why. I don't know that he has sent word ahead to have us shot on sight; Jack is a good-hearted old blackguard. But I would rather be wearing full armor; a flight of arrows wouldn't surprise me. Or a drop net just as we turned in among those trees."

"You really think so?"

"Depends on how angry he is. I mind once, when a man *really* offended him, the Doral had this poor rube stripped down and tied by his family jewels and placed—no, I can't tell that one." Rufo gulped and looked sick. "Big night last night, I'm not myself. Better we speak of pleasant things. You mentioned squeezing whey from a rock. No doubt you were thinking of the Strong Muldoon?"

"Damn it, don't change the subject!" My head was throbbing. "I won't ride under those trees and the man who lets fly a shaft at me had better check his own skin for punctures. I'm thirsty."

"Boss," Rufo pleaded. "*She* will neither eat nor drink on the Doral's land—even if they begged her to. And *She*'s right. You don't know the customs. Here one accepts what is freely given . . . but even a child is too proud to touch anything begrudged. Five miles more. Can't the hero who killed Igli before breakfast hold out another five miles?"

"Well . . . all right, all right! But this is a crazy sort of country,

"Mmmm . . ." he answered. "Have you ever been in Washington, D.C.?"

"Well—" I grinned wryly. "Touché! And I forgot that this is your native land. No offense intended."

"Oh, but it's not. What made you think so?"

"Why—" I tried to think. Neither Rufo nor Star had said so, but— "You know the customs, you speak the language like a native."

"Milord Oscar, I've forgotten how many languages I speak. When I hear one of them, I speak it."

"Well, you're not an American. Nor a Frenchman, I think."

He grinned merrily. "I could show you birth certificates from both countries—or could until we lost our baggage. But, no, I'm not from Earth."

"Then where are you from?"

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Rufo hesitated. "Best you get your facts from *Her*."

"Tripe! I've got both feet hobbled and a sack over my head. This is ridiculous."

"Boss," he said earnestly, "*She* will answer any question you ask. But you must ask them."

"I certainly shall!"

"So let's speak of other matters. You mentioned the Strong Muldoon—"

"*You* mentioned him."

"Well, perhaps I did. I never met Muldoon myself, though I've been in that part of Ireland. A fine country and the only really logical people on Earth. Facts won't sway them in the face of higher truth. An admirable people. I heard of Muldoon from one of my uncles, a truthful man who for many years was a ghost writer of political speeches. But at this time, due to a mischance while writing speeches for rival candidates, he was enjoying a vacation as a freelance correspondent for an American syndicate specializing in Sunday feature stories. He heard of the Strong Muldoon and tracked him down, taking train from Dublin, then a local bus, and at last Shank's Mares. He encountered a man ploughing a field with a one-horse plough . . . but this man was shoving the plough ahead of himself without benefit of horse, turning a neat eight-inch furrow. 'Ah!' said my uncle and called out, 'Mr. Muldoon!'

"The farmer stopped and called back, 'Bless you for the mistake, friend!'—picked up the plough in one hand, pointed with it and said, 'You'll be finding Muldoon that way. Strong, he is.'

"So my uncle thanked him and went on until he found another man setting out fence posts by shoving them into the ground with his bare hand . . . and in stony soil, it's true. So again my uncle hailed him as Muldoon.

"The man was so startled he dropped the ten or dozen six-inch posts he had tucked under the other arm. 'Get along with your blarney, now!' he called back. 'You must know that Muldoon lives farther on down this very same road. He's *strong*.'

"The next local my uncle saw was building a stone fence. Dry-stone work it was and very neat. This man was trimming the rock without hammer or trowel, splitting them with the edge of his hand and doing the fine trim by pinching off bits with his fingers. So again my uncle addressed a man by that glorious name.

"The man started to speak but his throat was dry from all that stone dust; his voice failed him. So he grabbed up a large rock, squeezed it the way you squeezed Igli—forced water out of it as if it had been a goatskin, drank. Then he said, 'Not me, my friend. He's *strong*, as everyone knows. Why, many is the time that I have

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seen him insert his little finger—"

My mind was distracted from this string of lies by a wench pitching hay just across the ditch from the road. She had remarkable pectoral muscles and a lava-lava just suited her. She saw me eyeing her and gave me the eye right back, with a wiggle tossed in.

"You were saying?" I asked.

"Eh? '—just to the first joint . . . and hold himself at arm's length for *hours!*' "

"Rufo," I said, "I don't believe it could have been more than a few minutes. Strain on the tissues, and so forth."

"Boss," he answered in a hurt tone, "I could take you to the very spot where the Mighty Dugan used to perform this stunt."

"You said his name was 'Muldoon.' "

"He was a Dugan on his mother's side, very proud of her he was. You'll be pleased to know, milord, that the boundary of the Doral's land is now in sight. Lunch in minutes only."

"I can use it. With a gallon of anything, even water."

"Passed by acclamation. Truthfully, milord, I'm not at my best today. I need food and drink and a long siesta before the fighting starts, or I'll yawn when I should parry. Too large a night."

"I didn't see you at the banquet."

"I was there in spirit. In the kitchen the food is hotter, the choice is better, and the company less formal. But I had no intention of making a night of it. Early to bed is my motto. Moderation in all things. Epictetus. But the pastry cook— Well, she reminds me of another girl I once knew, my partner in a legitimate business, smuggling. But *her* motto was that anything worth doing at all is worth overdoing—and she did. She smuggled on top of smuggling, a sideline of her own unmentioned to me and not taken into account—for I was listing every item with the customs officers, a copy with the bribe, so that they would know I was honest.

"But a girl can't walk through the gates fat as a stuffed goose and walk back through them twenty minutes later skinny as the figure one—not that she was, just a manner of speaking—without causing thoughtful glances. If it hadn't been for the strange thing the dog did in the night, the busies would have nabbed us."

"What was the strange thing the dog did in the night?"

"Just what I was doing last night. The noise woke us and we were out over the roof and free, but with nothing to show for six months hard work but skinned knees. But that pastry cook— You saw her, milord. Brown hair, blue eyes, a widow's peak and the rest remarkably like Sophia Loren."

"I have a vague memory of someone like that."

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"Then you didn't see her, there is nothing vague about Nalia. As may be, I had intended to lead the life sanitary last night, knowing that there would be bloodshed today. You know:

" 'Once at night and outen the light;

Once in the morning, a new day a-borning'

"—as the Scholar advised. But I hadn't reckoned with Nalia. So here I am with no sleep and no breakfast and if I'm dead before nightfall in a pool of my own blood, it'll be partly Nalia's doing."

"I'll shave your corpse, Rufo; that's a promise." We had passed the marker into the next county but Star didn't slow down. "By the bye, where did you learn the undertaker's trade?"

"The what? Oh! That was a far place indeed. The top of that rise, behind those trees, is a house and that's where we'll be having lunch. Nice people."

"Good!" The thought of lunch was a bright spot as I was again regretting my Boy Scout behavior of the night before. "Rufo, you had it all wrong about the strange thing the dog did in the night."

"Milord?"

"The dog did nothing in the night, that was the strange thing."

"Well, it certainly didn't *sound* that way," Rufo said doubtfully.

"Another dog, another far place. Sorry. What I started to say was: A funny thing happened to me on the way to bed last night—and I *did* lead the life sanitary."

"Indeed, milord?"

"In deed, if not in thought." I needed to tell somebody and Rufo was the sort of scoundrel I could trust. I told him the Story of the Three Bares.

"I should have risked it," I concluded. "And, swelp me, I would have, if that kid had been put to bed—alone—when she should have been. Or I think I would have, regardless of White Shotgun or jumping out windows. Rufo, why do the prettiest gals always have fathers or husbands? But I tell you the truth, there they were—the Big Bare, the Middle-Sized Bare, and the Littlest Bare, close enough to touch and all of them anxious to keep my bed warm—and I didn't do a damn thing! Go ahead and laugh. I deserve it."

He didn't laugh. I turned to look at him and his expression was piteous. "Milord! Oscar my comrade! *Tell me it isn't true!*"

"It is true," I said huffily. "And I regretted it at once. Too late. And *you* complained about *your* night!"

"Oh, my God!" He threw his mount into high gear and took off. Ars Longa looked back inquiringly over her shoulder, then continued on.

Rufo caught up with Star; they stopped, short of the house where lunch was to be expected. They waited and I joined them. Star

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was wearing no expression; Rufo looked unbearably embarrassed.

Star said, "Rufo, go beg lunch for us. Fetch it here. I would speak with milord alone."

"Yes, milady!" He got out fast.

Star said to me, still with no expression, "Milord Hero, is this true? What your groom reports to me?"

"I don't know what he reported."

"It concerned your failure—your alleged failure—last night."

"I don't know what you mean by 'failure.' If you want to know what I did after the banquet . . . I slept alone. Period."

She sighed but her expression did not change. "I wanted to hear it from your lips. To be just." Then her expression did change and I have never seen such anger. In a low, almost passionless voice she began chewing me out:

"You hero. You incredible butter-brained dolt. Clumsy, bumbling, loutish, pimple-pocked, underdone, over-muscled, idiotic—"

"Stop it!"

"Quiet, I am not finished with you. Insulting three innocent ladies, offending a staunch—"

"SHUT UP!!!"

The blast blew her hair back. I started in before she could rev up again. "Don't ever again speak to me that way, Star. Never."

"But—"

"Hold your tongue, you bad-tempered brat! You have not earned the right to speak to me that way. Nor will any girl ever earn the right. You will always—*always!*—address me politely and with respect. One more word of your nasty rudeness and I'll spank you until the tears fly."

"You wouldn't *dare!*"

"Get your hand away from that sword or I'll take it away from you, down your pants right here on the road, and spank you with *it.* Till your arse is red and you beg for mercy. Star, I do not fight females—but I do punish naughty children. Ladies I treat as ladies. Spoiled brats I treat as spoiled brats. Star, you could be the Queen of England and the Galactic Overlord all rolled into one—but ONE MORE WORD out of line from you, and down come your tights and you won't be able to sit for a week. Understand me?"

At last she said in a small voice, "I understand, milord."

"And besides that, I'm resigning from the hero business. I won't listen to such talk twice, I won't work for a person who treats me that way even once." I sighed, realizing that I had just lost my corporal's stripes again. But I always felt easier without them.

"Yes, milord." I could barely hear her. It occurred to me that it was a long way back to Nice. But it didn't worry me.

"All right, let's forget it."

"Yes, milord." She added quietly, "But may I explain *why* I spoke as I did?"

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"No."

"Yes, milord."

A long silent time later Rufo returned. He stopped out of earshot, I motioned him to join us.

We ate silently and I didn't eat much but the beer was good. Rufo tried once to make chitchat with an impossibility about another of his uncles. It couldn't have fallen flatter in Boston.

After lunch Star turned her mount—those "horses" have a small turning circle for their wheelbase but it's easier to bring them full circle in a tight place by leading them. Rufo said, "Milady?"

She said impassively, "I am returing to the Doral."

"*Milday!* Please not!"

"Dear Rufo," she said warmly but sadly. "You can wait up at that house—and if I'm not back in three days, you are free." She looked at me, looked away. "I hope that milord Oscar will see fit to escort me. But I do not ask it. I have not the right." She started off.

I was slow in getting Ars Longa turned; I didn't have the hang of it. Star was a good many bricks down the road; I started after her.

Rufo waited until I was turned, biting his nails, then suddenly climbed aboard and caught up with me. We rode knee to knee, a careful fifty paces behind Star. Finally he said, "This is suicide. You know that, don't you?"

"No, I didn't know it."

"Well, it is."

I said, "Is that why you are not bothering to say 'sir'?"

"Milord?" He laughed shortly and said, "I guess it is. No point in that nonsense when you are going to die soon."

"You're mistaken."

"Huh?"

" 'Huh, milord,' if you please. Just for practice. But from now on, even if we last only thirty minutes. Because *I* am running the show now—and not just as her stooge. I don't want any doubt in your mind as to who is boss once the fighting starts. Otherwise turn around and I'll give your mount a slap on the rump to get you moving. Hear me?"

"Yes, milord Oscar." He added thoughtfully, "I knew you were boss as soon as I got back. But I don't see how you did it. Milord; I have never seen *Her* meek before. May one ask?"

"One may not. But you have my permission to ask her. If you think it is safe. Now tell me about this 'suicide' matter—and don't say she doesn't want you to give me advice. From here on you'll give advice any time I ask—and keep your lip buttoned if I don't."

"Yes, milord. All right, the suicide prospects. No way to figure the odds. It depends on how angry the Doral is. But it won't be a fight, can't be. Either we get clobbered the instant we poke our noses in . . . or we are safe until

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we leave his land again, even if he tells us to turn around and ride away." Rufo looked very thoughtful. "Milord, if you want a blind guess— Well, I figure you've insulted the Doral the worst he has ever been hurt in the course of a long and touchy life. So it's about ninety-ten that, two shakes after we turn off the road, we are all going to be sprouting more arrows than Saint Sebastian."

"Star, too? She hasn't done anything. Nor have you." (Nor I, either, I added to myself. What a country!)

Rufo sighed. "Milord, each world has its own ways. Jock won't *want* to hurt Her. He likes Her. He's terribly fond of Her. You could say that he loves her. But if he kills you, he has *got* to kill Her. Anything else would be inhumane by his standards—and he's a very moral bloke; he's noted for it. And kill me, too, of course, but I don't count. He *must* kill *Her* even though it will start a chain of events that will wipe him out just as dead *once the news* gets out. The question is: Does he have to kill *you?* I figure he has to, knowing these people. Sorry . . . milord."

I mulled it over. "Then why are you here, Rufo?"

"Milord?"

"You can cut the 'sirs' down to one an hour. Why are you here? If your estimate is correct, your one sword and one bow can't affect the outcome. She gave you a fair chance to chicken out. So what is it? Pride? Or are *you* in love with her?"

"Oh, my God, no!"

Again I saw Rufo really shocked. "Excuse me," he went on. "You caught me with my guard down." He thought about it. "Two reasons, I suppose. The first is that if Jock allows us to parley—well, *She* is quite a talker. In the second place"—he glanced at me—"I'm superstitious, I admit it. You're a man with luck. I've seen it. So I want to be close to you even when reason tells me to run. You could fall in a cesspool and—"

"Nonsense. You should hear my hardluck story."

"Maybe in the past. But I'm betting the dice as they roll." He shut up.

A bit later I said, "You stay here." I speeded up and joined Star. "Here are the plans," I told her. "When we get there, you stay out on the road with Rufo. I'm going in alone."

She gasped. "Oh, milord! No!"

"Yes."

"But—"

"Star, do you want me back? As your champion?"

"With all my heart!"

"All right. Then do it my way."

She waited before answering, "Oscar—"

"Yes, Star."

"I will do as you say. But will you let me explain before you de-

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cide what you will say?"

"Go on."

"In this world, the place for a lady to ride is by her champion. And that is where I would want to be, my Hero, when in peril. Especially when in peril. But I'm not pleading for sentiment, nor for empty form. Knowing what I now know I can prophesy with certainty that, if you go in first, you will die at once, and I will die—and Rufo—as soon as they can chase us down. That will be quickly, our mounts are tired. On the other hand, if I go in alone—"

"No."

"Please, milord. I was not proposing it. If I were to go in alone, I would be almost as likely to die at once as you would be. Or perhaps, instead of feeding me to the pigs, he would simply have me feed the pigs and be a plaything of the pig boys—a fate merciful rather than cold justice in view of my utter degradation in returning without you. But the Doral is fond of me and I think he might let me live . . . as a pig girl and no better than pigs. This I would risk if necessary and wait my chance to escape, for I cannot afford pride; I have no pride, only necessity." Her voice was husky with tears.

"Star, Star!"

"My darling!"

"Huh? You said—"

"May I say it? We may not have much time. My Hero . ... my darling." She reached out blindly, I took her hand; she leaned toward me and pressed it to her breast.

Then she straightened up but kept my hand. "I'm all right now. I am a woman when I least expect it. No, my darling Hero, there is only one way for us to go in and that is side by side, proudly. It is not only safest, it is the only way I would wish it—could I afford pride. I can afford anything else. I could buy you the Eiffel Tower for a trinket, and replace it when you broke it. But not pride."

"Why is it safest?"

"Because he may—I say 'may'—let us parley. If I can get in ten words, he'll grant a hundred. Then a thousand. I may be able to heal his hurt."

"All right. But— Star, what *did* I do to hurt him? I *didn't!* I went to a lot of trouble *not* to hurt him."

She was silent a while, then—"You are an American."

"What's that got to do with it? Jock doesn't know it."

"It has, perhaps, everything to do with it. No, America is at most a name to the Doral for, although he has studied the Universes, he has never traveled. But— You will not be angry with me again?"

"Uh . . . let's call a King's-X on that. Say anything you need to say but explain things. Just don't chew me out. Oh, hell, chew me out if you like—this once. Just don't let it be a habit . . . my darling."

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She squeezed my hand. "Never will I again! The error lay in *my* not realizing that you are American. I don't know America, not the way Rufo does. If Rufo had been present— But he wasn't; he was wenching in the kitchen. I suppose I assumed, when you were offered table and roof and bed, that you would behave as a Frenchman would. I never dreamed that you would refuse it. Had I known, I could have spun a thousand excuses for you. An oath taken. A holy day in your religion. Jock would have been disappointed but not hurt; he is a man of honor."

"But— Damn it, I still don't see why he wants to shoot me for *not* doing something I would expect, back home, that he might shoot me for *doing*. In this country, is a man forced to accept any proposition a gal makes? And why did she run and complain? Why didn't she keep it secret? Hell, she didn't even *try*. She dragged in her daughters."

"But, darling, it was *never* a secret. He asked you publicly and publicly you accepted. How would *you* feel if your bride, on your wedding night, kicked you out of the bedroom? 'Table, and roof, and bed.' You accepted."

" 'Bed.' Star, in America beds are multiple-purpose furniture. Sometimes we sleep in them. Just sleep. I didn't dig it."

"I know now. You didn't know the idiom. My fault. But do you now see why he was completely— and publicly—humiliated?"

"Well, yes, but he brought it on himself. He asked me in public. It would have been worse if I had said No, then."

"Not at all. You didn't have to accept. You could have refused graciously. Perhaps the most graceful way, even though it be white lie, is for the hero to protest his tragic inability—temporary or permanent—from wounds received in the very battle that proved him a hero."

"I'll remember that. But I still don't see why he was so astoundingly generous in the first place."

She turned and looked at me. "My darling, is it all right for me to say that *you* have astounded *me* every time I have talked with you? And I had thought I had passed beyond all surprises, years ago."

"It's mutual. You always astound me. However, I like it—except one time."

"My lord Hero, how often do you think a simple country squire has a chance to gain for his family a Hero's son, and raise it as his own? Can you not feel his gall-bitter disappointment at what you snatched from him after he thought you had promised this boon? His shame? His wrath?"

I considered it. "Well, I'll be dogged. It happens in America, too. But they don't boast about it."

"Other countries, other cus-

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toms. At the very least, he had thought that he had the honor of a hero treating him as a brother. And with luck he expected the get of a hero, for house Doral."

"Wait a minute! Is that why he sent me *three*? To improve the odds?"

"Oscar, he would eagerly have sent you *thirty* . . . if you had hinted that you felt heroic enough to attempt it. As it was, he sent his chief wife and his two favorite daughters." She hesitated. "What I still don't understand—" She stopped and asked me a blunt question.

"Hell, no!" I protested, blushing. "Not since I was fifteen. But one thing that put me off was that mere child. She's one. I think."

Star shrugged. "She may be. But she is *not* a child; in Nevia she is a woman. And even if she is unbroached as yet, I'll wager she's a mother in another twelvemonth. But if you were loth to tap her, why didn't you shoo her out and take her older sister? That quaint hasn't been virgin since she's had breasts, to my certain knowledge —and I hear that Muri is 'some dish' if that is the American idiom."

I muttered. I had been thinking the same thing. But I didn't want to discuss it with Star.

She said, "Pardonne-moi, mon cher? Tu as dit?"

"I said I had given up sex crimes for Lent!"

She looked puzzled. "But Lent is over, even on Earth. And it is not here, at all."

"Sorry."

"Still, I'm pleased that you didn't pick Muri over Letva; Muri would have been unbearably stuck-up with her mother after such a thing. But do I understand that you *will* repair this, if I can straighten it out?" She added, "It makes great difference in how I handle the diplomacies."

(Star, Star—*you* are the one I want to bed!) "This is what you wish . . . my darling?"

"Oh, how much it would help!"

"Okay. You're the doctor. One . . . three . . . thirty—I'll die trying. But no little kids!"

"No problem. Let me think. If the Doral lets me get in just *five* words—" She fell silent. Her hand was pleasantly warm.

I did some thinking, too. These strange customs had ramifications, some of which I had still shied away from. How was it, if Letva had immediately told her husband what a slob I was—

"Star? Where did *you* sleep last night?"

She looked around sharply. "Milord . . . is it permitted to ask you, please, to *mind your own business*?"

"I suppose so. But everybody seems to be minding mine."

"I am sorry. But I am very much worried and my heaviest worries you do not know as yet. It was a

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fair question and deserves a fair answer. Hospitality balances, always, and honors flow both ways. I slept in the Doral's bed. However, if it matters—and it may to you; I still do not understand Americans—I was wounded yesterday, it still bothered me. Jock is a sweet and gentle soul. We slept. Just slept."

I tried to make it nonchalant. "Sorry about the wound. Does it hurt now?"

"Not at all. The dressing will fall off by tomorrow. However—Last night was not the first time I enjoyed table and roof and bed at house Doral. Jock and I are old friends, beloved friends—which is why I think I can risk that he may grant me a few seconds before killing me."

"Well, I had that figured out."

"Oscar, by your standards—the way you have been raised—I am a bitch."

"Oh, never! A princess."

"A bitch. But I am not of your country and I was reared by another code. By my standards, and they seem good to me, I am a moral woman. Now . . . am I still 'your darling?' "

"My darling!"

"My darling Hero. My champion. Lean close and kiss me. If we die, I would my mouth be warm with your lips. The entrance is close now, just around this bend."

"I know."

A few moments later we rode, swords sheathed and bows unstrung, proudly into the target area.

(*to be continued next month*)

WESTERCON XVI

WESTERCON XVI (16th annual West Coast Science Fiction Conference) is on July 4-5-6-7 at the Hyatt House in Burlingame (near San Francisco Airport). KRIS NEVILLE is Professional Guest of Honor, *F.M.* and *Elinor Busby* are Fan Guests of Honor. Con theme: "Science Fiction and the Fan Today." Addresses, panels, banquet, cabaret masquerade, a Meet Your Favorite Authors party, and a swimming party with genuine aquatic clowns. Fun and games. Educational. Gee, we wish we could make it! Send $1.50 membership fee to J. Ben Stark (an honest man), 113 Ardmore Rd., Berkeley, California.

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When the definitive history of the so-called Sword and Sorcery story in this century is written, a respectful chapter must be devoted to Fritz Leiber. Who here, in few words and beautiful, employs that form to tell a saga in miniature; and to relate an Allegory.

SUCCESS

by Fritz Leiber

THE HERO STOOD IN THE WASTE-land of gray sand sparsely dotted with gray boulders and thin clumps of spiney gray-green grass, and he confronted the Wall.

On the Hero's out-thrust left arm, clutching the gloved wrist with dexter talons, stood a Golden Eagle which would have sunk any other arm than his and which the Hero had climbed the sky itself to snare and master. In its sinister talons the eagle held the end of a knotted golden thread, stronger than any rope, woven of the head-hairs of blonde lamias and vampires, and so long that its coilings were a smooth golden hillock at the Hero's foot.

At the Hero's right side stood a Brazen Bull, half again as high at the shoulder as he and which the Hero had crossed limitless flinty plains to challenge and to wear down to his will. The bull's brazen brow was like the ram of a quinquireme and transparent green flames flickered from its nostrils and its quiet heartbeat trembled the ground.

On the Hero's back hung a great Silver Horn, formed from the single poison-tooth of a dragon which the Hero had descended the nethermost abyss called Nadir to rout from its cave and slay.

The Wall was most simply like the hemisphere of night boldly encroaching into that of day, with not an atom of twilight between. In it was set a great shut gate only blacker than itself. The Wall shot up vertically to where the feather-clouds are, ending in vast jagged crenelations that from its foot looked tinier than saw teeth. Behind the Wall, the Hero knew, lay all power and wealth and worldly delights.

The Golden Eagle shook out its wings, clashing the glittering pinions, and shrieked at the Wall a

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challenge that was like a thousand fifes, and the Brazen Bull bellowed one that engulfed the sound and shake of its own heartbeat, and the Silver Horn vibrated against the Hero's back with its eagerness to blow.

The Wall made no answer. No tiniest wicket observably opened in the gate for an eye to spy, no midge-small face looked down the black sheer.

The Hero threw up his left arm with the great weight of the eagle on it, and the bird bated from his wrist and smote downward the air in a great beat that swept the fine gray sand grains aside like a giant's besom, and began rapidly to mount in a tight spiral, trailing the golden thread.

The Hero waited until the golden bird looked no bigger than a winged topaz, then hammered once the Brazen Bull on the great ridge of its shoulder blade and pointed at the door in the Wall. The beast pawed the gray sand delicately, then lowered the ram of the brow. Green jets a yard long and straight as swords shot from its nostrils and it began to move toward the door, slowly at first, then faster and faster, and the pounding of its hooves shook the ground as if it were an earthquake climbed from its strait, leagues-deep lair and charging in the open.

The Hero planted his feet wide against the ground's heaving and he unsling the Silver Horn from his back and set its poison-point to his lips and blew. The note of the horn was like the eagle's skirling and the bull's roaring commingled, and there was a dreadful pulsation to it which infected the Wall so that black ripples shot up it and off to either side, and it wavered like a black comber about to break, and the Hero exulted in his heart.

But then the ripples returned, as if reflected along the Wall by distant mirrors, and they struck back conjoined at the Silver Horn which had engendered them. The horn stung the Hero's lips with its unbearably multiplied vibrations and suddenly it shattered entire and fell to the earth as a silver dust.

There was a double, earth-transmitted thunderclap as the Brazen Bull smashed head-on against the gate and fell dead on its side.

One afterclap then, as the Golden Eagle, enmeshed in the thread it had carried aloft, plummeted like a golden bolt from a sky-demon's crossbow, and struck a gray target-boulder and did not stir.

Silence swiftly gathered and the Wall was as before.

The Hero dropped to his knees and bowed his head and shoulders low. Almost he abased himself in mind as well as body and worshipped the Wall, for the gath-

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ered silence was very terrible, but in that moment of uncertainty he felt a feather-touch on his left little finger.

Glancing sideways he saw a tiny leopard-spider crouching in a gray grass-clump and touching him with right fore-leg.

Now although the Hero had tamed bulls and slain dragons, he had a great fear of spiders, but at this moment his misery was so great that he could feel no fear at all, and so he suffered the touch of the minute monster and the staring of the eight pin-point eyes of its wee golden face.

There was a little scuffling noise and a circlet of sand fell in next to the grass-clump, and from the small hole thus made there poked up toward the Hero the quivering blind snout of a mole, its fur rusty-brazen.

Simultaneously there was the faintest stirring of the sand under the right hand of the Hero, and he lifted a silver-gray pinch of it in his fingers.

Then, in a tiny high voice that was like the sidewise clashing of its golden mandibles, the Spider said, "I carry a line to the top of Wall."

The Mole quavered ghostlily, "I dig under the Wall."

And, as if impalpable winds stirred it, the Sand in the Hero's fingers sang faintly, "I wear the Wall down."

Moving most gently, so as to affright none of his new allies, the Hero looked up at the Wall and pressed from his lips a smile.

THE RESPONDENTS

In a familiar atmosphere
We creatures of the lower air
With nostrils and with eyes endowed,
Not knowing where great windstreams veer,
Respond to clarity or cloud
If we but listen, breathe, or stare.
The mute mechanics of our flesh
Answer that high, unquiet sea
Where wordless rhythms intermesh
To make a planet's poetry.

—Doris Pitkin Buck

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The author of this remarkable vignette is a freshman at the University of Texas, attending on a National Merit Scholarship, and graduated from high school only last spring. (We realize that most college freshmen graduated from high school only last spring, but we were so impressed by this piece that it did not at first occur to us that Mr. Smith was not yet eligible to vote.) He *may also be the only F&SF contributor to have had an award-winning essay printed in THE CONGRESSIONAL RECORD—which we venture to suggest, sight unseen, did wonders for a journal not well-known for literary merit. Very young Mr. Smith is staff political cartoonist for the weekly* Texas Observer *(Austin), and is interested in book illustration, film designing, and sociology. We called his first contribution to us a "remarkable vignette," for a story it is not; you will very likely find it hard to forget for all of that, though. And the next time you meet someone who is . . . well . . . different, you will think of it.*

WITH THESE HANDS

by Kenneth Smith

"ARE YOU ENJOYING THIS?" I leaned over and whispered into Webster's ear. He looked at me stonily and nodded so slowly that I thought it betrayed his lying.

To our right some students were verbally dissecting their professors —and I knew he wasn't listening to that. Or possibly he had an ear bent to the political clichés from which a conversation was being built to our left . . . I couldn't tell. Webster was nothing short of oddness incarnate even in class, sitting immobilely, reacting long after everyone else, never asking questions, never shifting his weight from buttock to buttock, writing flawless précis for all of the prof's paragraphs,—and at a party like this he broadcast a noble incomprehension by glancing around the buzzing room, away from the conversation to which he was supposed to be listening. Perhaps this restlessness belied his boredom or perhaps it only indicated that his interests would not lie still at one

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point on the spectrum. At any rate, I refused to feel guilty for inviting him to a party with me, even if the anarchic activity of the party *was* a complex terror to him. I couldn't judge his comfort or discomfort from his social nature, stoical as it was.

I shifted focus and began to listen to the political discussion. A Young Republican was combatting the rationalizations of a Young Democrat with a sort of militant provincialism: catchword resounded upon catchword as Federal Intervention went down before Individual Initiative, although the slow March of the Human Mind trampled Ancestor Worship.

At this stage of the conflict, a sound at my elbow startled my viscera like slapped jello—Webster was entering the fray, stoical Webster of the incomprehensibly literal mind. "Freedom," he said in his flat, almost totally inflectionless voice, "you're both talking about a kind of freedom possible only to non-social animals. Freedom is not the right to do as you please; in a complex society such as ours, with individuals bounded by massive bureaucracies, absolute freedom for the few rests on the absolute submission of the many. Freedom in society today can mean only the right to control those forces—governments, corporations, institutional orders—which affect you. That is, if freedom is to exist for all, then it must exist in limited spheres for each."

Both the Young Republican and the Young Democrat agreed that Webster's analysis was very "significant," and then they continued their debate, moving on to the topic of Marxism, then revolution and industrialization and finally, at the pinnacle of their acuity, to the party refreshments. The fact that they never again touched upon the topic of individual freedom led me to think that neither of these representatives of the nation's political monoliths quite understood what Webster had said. Webster may lack any kind of sociological imagination but at least he isn't an illiterate in the field.

In fact, that pretty well summarized the entity of Webster Daum for me: a thorough absence of any imagination and an equally thorough mastery of any body of facts or theory. The literal mind. If it weren't for his wide reading, he would probably flunk the sociology class he had with me; he had to have examples to work with, solid specifics with a minimum of three dimensions. His mind was a ruler, straight and true and excellent for metric purposes but hopelessly inflexible. Nothing resembling simplicity, mind you—although at times I mistakenly regarded it as incomprehension. Just how much anguish his scholastic nature caused

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him in his relations with other persons, I couldn't tell. His stoicism communicated nothing, and apparently there was no one who knew him below the skin. No one knew where he was staying; I myself saw him only in class and had to look up his address in the publications information file. I merely had to suppose that he had mastered enough social graces to lubricate his dealings, but I had no idea at all how he reacted internally to people.

"Let's get a drink," I told him, pressing his upper arm. Assuming that at times it just might be possible for them to listen to someone besides themselves, I waited until we were out of earshot of both the Republican and the Democrat before I remarked, tossing a glance back at the debaters, "There isn't any room in either of their *Weltanschauungen,* their theories of reality for your analysis. One of them," I said, smiling in anticipation of my own irreverence, "worships at the altar of unfettered freedom for the business corporations, the other at the altar of unquestioning obedience to the federal government's bureaucracy. You do understand that it's rather . . . *futile* to butt in?"

He shrugged and half-smiled. "I thought I would at least get a different reaction from them. But —one is unaware of the tyranny implicit in the absolute freedom to hold property, and the other one is unaware of how far the federal government—with all the appointments and disproportional representation and lobby pressures—is from being a democracy. What do *you* say to them?"

I blew out my breath in a quiet laugh. "I don't. I'm not sure I have any political philosophy to which I can persuade people." I handed him a drink and was startled at the way he took it—holding it only between his thumb and index finger.

But then the host called us like phlegmatic hogs to the piano while the party belles plied a pianist into a performance. People called out requests as he warmed up on octaves; the requests reminded me what an international group I was in—"Las Mañanitas" (an early morning song not entirely inappropriate at one in the morning) and themes from Broadway shows, a few Hebrew songs I didn't catch and a few folk songs from Woody Guthrie.

The crescendo of the singing struck when we gathered our sodden wits and lungpower, and assaulted the *Oklahoma!* score. The sonority was so great I almost didn't notice when Webster turned away, but out of the corner of my eye I did see him. I thought he was coughing or clearing his throat, but when he turned around again his eyes were red and wet.

"Do you feel all right?" I asked, whispering fiercely in his ear.

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His head quaked nervously before he nodded. But then, after the singing, I saw him walk suddenly and quietly toward the door and leave. I apologized to the host for his malaise and left as hastily as I could. I overtook him a block away, walking in the mammoth shadow between two buildings on the university campus.

"Are you sick, Webster?" I called to him.

"Am I *sick?*" he cried in an emotional outburst that made me rock back on my heels. He stood still and held both his hands out to me, not as much like a man begging for help as a man straining to explain something. Even in the weak reflected light from a nearby church steeple, I could see that the muscles in his hands were drawn tight, the fingers crooked in agony, the blood vessels apparent as great knots.

Then he began to speak to me in the quiet and uneasy speech of a man balanced between crying and cursing. "The music, all the—the architecture of sounds that you can build just by striking coils of wire . . . ," he clutched his throat, "—or by vibrating vocal cords with wind. The easy way the man at the piano vaulted across octaves on the keys. . . ."

Astonished and embarrassed, I had not been expecting an outpouring of esthetic feeling from him. "That's right, but what does that have to do—"

"I'll *tell* you! Look at this hand."

"Yes, it's yours," I commented in my confusion.

"No," he said softly. "It isn't. The index finger and the opposing thumb are mine. The others are dummies." He manipulated his fingers to show me that the other three moved only stiffly, on both hands. I had never suspected that he suffered a physical impairment.

"Do you see? On the piano my real hand would have a span of six or seven keys. In reality, I have one finger too few to hold an artist's brush, six too few to operate a typewriter. And my voice," he said flatly. "I don't even have a range of half an octave. I'm tone-deaf."

"That's not anything to get—"

"That's easy for you to say," he bit off. He grabbed my right hand and spread out my thumb and little finger like the pale wings of a bird. "If you wanted to learn the piano, the only thing holding you back would be your own unwillingness to learn. Your span would stretch eleven or twelve keys. If you wanted to sing, you would feel frustrated, perhaps, because you couldn't reach middle C. But I can't control my vocal cords at all—nor the muscles in my dummy hand. You weep that you haven't got it all, and I wail in great animal exhalations because I haven't got any. I hear the pianist play a few notes from the treble, like . . . like. . . ."

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"Cold, like breaking icicles?"

"And I can't take it. I can't even put it into words, and you have similes rolling off your tongue."

"You just have a different kind of intellect. For the love of . . . it's nothing to get broken up about, someone with a mind as keen as yours. . . ."

"Isn't it? Anxieties and frustrations are so easy to deal with when they belong to someone else, to someone different, to someone utterly different."

"Utterly? I hope we at least have something in common, as fellow mortals," I said, smiling in darkness.

"No. We don't. You don't understand, but neither do I, I suppose. I am not a freak. I was born with two fingers to a hand, with inelastic vocal cords, with an unimaginative mind, because my parents before me had these characteristics, and their parents before them. The records of this most articulately backward university list me as a foreign exchange student, but no one in my 'official' hometown has ever heard of me, none of the schools I have credit for attending even know my name. For the records to say that I was born and educated in London is only a small lie; to say that I was born on this planet and belong to your species is the great lie. How would *you* like it, to play the cripple studying among the athletic, the mute among the articulate, the clumsy among the graceful, and the dimwitted among the talented? What kind of reward is it to master nuclear power and build bridges across space, only to find a multifarious mammal who is largely ignorant and mostly starving but who daily begets miracles with sounds and ink and paint, and words and ideas? You and I do share something, the faculty of reason—but outside its orderly and well-defined boundaries I am lost."

I could only stare dumb and unbelieving, listening to his strange breath, the wind blown through a different kind of throat.

"Don't you see?" he pleaded, turning away from me. "I want to be caught up in your insanity, I want to try to nail reality down for a second, to believe in the fiction that I am able to make something both beautiful and permanent. I want to work with my hands, to use sounds and paper and words, but I can't, I can't even begin, I'm utterly unable to draw relationships or see connections. I have to be told about them first. A pedestrian way of thinking. At first I feel the beauty or the sadness in me like incipient hunger but I don't know what to do, don't know how to woo it, how to describe it. The damnable eternal frustration of having something placed forever out of your reach. And then I hate it, and there is no

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room for even the music which I can enjoy only as listener, the art I enjoy only as spectator, never participant, never actor, never agent. There is only the tense thunder of blood in my ears as hate for the airproof fabric and the right-angle masonry of my being, that locks me prisoner in my own house! Lie strangely sometimes in your bed, earthman, mortal—lie so that you can hear your heart—"

"Like a metronome."

"Like a metronome," he sobbed, accepting the simile I had drawn for him, "measuring the night away in long pulsating units of darkness and solitude, of red throbs and suffocating thoughts. Lie strangely and think about poetry and stories you've attempted, canvases you've filled, letters you've written—all the by-products of your life. Lie and imagine that you have been borne away on interstellar currents from everyone you know and love; imagine that the umbilical cords of a lifetime of friendships have been surgically severed by the overpowering force that makes you long for an accomplishment futilely, like. . . ."

"Like the moth fluttering suicidally at the flame."

". . . imagine thousands of emotions tugging, tweaking at your heart. . . ."

"Like a nation of ghosts."

". . . the thoughts of times of growing and moving away seizing your heart in a cold grip—and then lie there as dumbly as if your tongue were cut out from birth, lie there strangely on a planet wheeling around a sun which never warmed your ancestors, lie there and try to embrace the fanaticism, the madness of trying to preserve the unpreservable, of trying to relive the past, of trying to crystallize and freeze something that must live and grow. Lie there tongueless and castrated by fate, and cry strangely as you try to speak with lungs that will not obey you. Then try to remember someone else's affliction."

When he walked away from me, he knew I wouldn't follow. Under an empty black sky, I was listening to an ancient, a racially familiar sound in my ears: the awkward music of my own human heart.

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Herewith Dr. Asimov's Portable Treasury of the World's Best Scientists, a gazette of the architects of physical knowledge. Except the Lord build a house, the builders labor in vain.

THE ISAAC WINNERS

by Isaac Asimov

WHEN ONE LOOKS BACK OVER THE MONTHS OR YEARS, IT BECOMES awfully tempting to try to pick out the best in this or that category. Even the ancient Greeks did it, choosing the "seven wise men" and the "seven wonders of the world."

We ourselves are constantly choosing the ten best-dressed women of the year or the ten most notable news-breaks or we list the American presidents in order of excellence. The F. B. I. and other law-enforcement agencies even list criminals in the order of their desirability (behind bars, that is).

There is a certain sense of power in making such lists. An otherwise undistinguished person suddenly finds himself able to make decisions with regard to outstanding people, taking this one into the fold and hurling that one into the outer darkness. One can, after some thought, move *x* up the list and *y* down, possibly changing the people so moved in the esteem of the world. It is almost god-like, power like that.

Well, can I be faced with the possibility of assuming god-like power and not assume it at once? Of course not.

As it happens I have been spending nearly two years writing a history of science and in the course of writing it, I could not help but grow more or less intimate with about a thousand scientists of all shapes and varieties.

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Why not, then, make a list of the "ten greatest scientists of history?" Why not, indeed?

I sat down, convinced that in ten seconds I could rattle off the ten best. However, as I placed the cerebral wheels into gear, I found myself quailing. The only scientist who, it seemed to me, indubitably belonged to the list and who would, without the shadow of a doubt, be on such a list prepared by anyone but a consummate idiot, was Isaac Newton.

But how to choose the other nine?

It occurred to me to do as one did with the Academy Awards (and such like affairs) and set up nominations, and after some time at that I found I had no less than 72 scientists whom I could call "great" with an absolutely clear conscience. From this list, I could then slowly and by a process of gradual elimination, pick out my ten best.

This raised a side-issue. I would be false to current American culture if I did not give the ten winners a named award. The motion picture has its Oscar, television its Emmy, mystery fiction its Edgar and science fiction its Hugo. All are first names and the latter two honor great men in the respective fields: Edgar Allan Poe and Hugo Gernsback.

For the all-time science greats, then, why not an award named for the greatest scientist of them all—Newton. To go along with Oscar, Emmy, Edgar and Hugo, let us have the Isaac. I will hand out Isaac Awards and choose the Isaac Winners.* Here, then, is my list of nominees, with a few words intended to indicate, for each, the reasons for the nomination. These are presented in alphabetical order—and I warn you the choice of nominees is entirely my own and is based on no other authority.

1- *Archimedes* (287?-212 B.C.). Greek mathematician. Considered the greatest mathematician and engineer of ancient times. Discovered the principle of the lever and the principle of buoyancy. Worked out a good value of 'pi' by the principle of exhaustion, nearly inventing calculus in the process.

2- *Aristotle* (384-322 B.C.). Greek philosopher. Codified all of ancient knowledge. Classified living species and groped vaguely toward evolutionary ideas. His logic proved the earth was round and established a world-system that was wrong, but that might have proved most fruitful if succeeding generations had not too slavishly admired him. (See THE SHAPE OF THINGS, F & SF, September, 1962.)

* *If the Stern Editor has some wild theory that the choice of the name derives from any source other than Newton, let him try to prove it. Besides, what conceivable alternate origin could there be?*[1]

[1] *Pshaw!—the Stern Editor.*

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3- *Arrhenius, Svante A.* (1859-1927). Swedish physicist and chemist. Established theory of electrolytic dissociation, which is the basis of modern electrochemistry. Nobel Prize, 1903. (See MY BUILT-IN DOUBTER, F & SF, April, 1961.)

4- *Berzelius, Jons J.* (1779-1848). Swedish chemist. Was the first to establish accurate table of atomic weights. Worked out chemical symbols still used in writing formulas. Pioneered electrochemistry and notably improved methods of inorganic analysis.

5- *Bohr, Niels* (1885-1962). Danish physicist. First to apply quantum theory to atomic structure, and demonstrated the connection between electronic energy levels and spectral lines. Suggested the distribution of electrons among "shells" and rationalized the periodic table of elements. Nobel Prize, 1922.

6- *Boyle, Robert* (1627-1691). Irish-born British physicist and chemist. First to have studied the properties of gases quantitatively. First to advance operational definition of an element.

7- *Broglie, Louis V. de* (1892-1960). French physicist. Discovered the wave nature of electrons, and of particles in general, completing the wave/particle duality. Nobel Prize, 1929.

8- *Cannizzaro, Stanislao* (1826-1910). Italian chemist. Established usefulness of atomic weights in chemical calculations, and in working out the formulas of organic compounds.

9- *Cavendish, Henry* (1731-1810). English physicist and chemist. Discovered hydrogen and determined the mass of the earth. Virtually discovered argon and pioneered in the study of electricity. (See THE ELEMENT OF PERFECTION, F & SF, November 1960, and SLOW BURN, F & S F, October 1962.)

10- *Copernicus, Nicolaus* (1473-1543). Polish astronomer. Enunciated heliocentric theory of the solar system, with sun at center and earth moving about it as one of the planets. Initiated the "Scientific Revolution" in the physical sciences.

11- *Crick, Francis H. C.* (1916-). English physicist and biochemist. Worked out the helical structure of the DNA molecule, which was the key breakthrough in modern molecular biology. Nobel Prize, 1962.

12- *Curie, Marie S.* (1867-1934). Polish-French chemist. Her investigations of radioactivity glamorized the subject. Discovered radium. Nobel Prize, 1903 *and* 1911. (Only person in history to win two.)

13- *Cuvier, Georges L. C. F. D.* (1769-1832) French biologist. Founder of comparative anatomy and, through systematic studies of fossils, founder of paleontology as well.

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14- *Dalton, John* (1766-1844). English chemist. Discovered law of multiple proportions in chemistry, which led him to advance an atomic theory that served as the key unifying concept in modern chemistry.

15- *Darwin, Charles R.* (1809-1882). English naturalist. Worked out a theory of evolution by natural selection which is the central, unifying theme of modern biology. (See THOSE CRAZY IDEAS, F & SF, January 1960; THE MODERN DEMONOLOGY, F & SF, January 1962; and THE LOST GENERATION, F & SF, February, 1963.)

16- *Davy, Humphrey* (1778-1829). English chemist. Established importance of electrochemistry by utilizing an electric current to prepare elements not previously prepared by ordinary chemical means. These included such elements as sodium, potassium, calcium, and barium.

17- *Ehrlich, Paul* (1854-1915). German bacteriologist. Pioneered in the staining of bacteria. Worked out methods of disease therapy through immune sera and also discovered chemical compounds specific against particular diseases, notably syphilis. Hence founder of both serum therapy and chemotherapy. Nobel Prize, 1908.

18- *Einstein, Albert* (1879-1955). German-Swiss-American physicist. Established quantum theory, earlier put forth by Planck, by using it to explain the photoelectric effect. Worked out the theory of relativity to serve as a broader and more useful world-picture than that of Newton. Nobel Prize, 1922.

19- *Faraday, Michael* (1791-1867). English chemist and physicist. Advanced the concept of "lines of force." Devised the first electric generator capable of converting mechanical energy into electrical energy. Worked out the laws of electrochemistry and pioneered in the field of low-temperature work.

20- *Fermi, Enrico* (1901-1954). Italian-American physicist. Investigated neutron bombardment of uranium, initiating work that led to the atomic bomb, in the development of which he was a key figure. Outstanding theoretician in the field of sub-atomic physics. Nobel Prize, 1938.

21- *Franklin, Benjamin* (1706-1790). American universal talent. Demonstrated the electrical nature of lightning and invented the lightning rod. Enunciated the view of electricity as a single fluid, with positive charge representing an excess and negative charge a deficiency.

22- *Freud, Sigmund* (1856-1939). Austrian neurologist. Founded psychoanalysis and revolutionized concepts of mental disease.

23- *Galileo* (1564-1642). Italian astronomer and physicist. Studied the motion of falling bodies, disrupting the Aristotelian world-

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system and laying the foundation for the Newtonian one. He popularized experimentation and quantitative measurement and is the most important single founder of experimental science. He was the first to turn a telescope upon the heavens and founded modern astronomy.

24- *Gauss, Karl F.* (1777-1855). German mathematician and astronomer. Perhaps greatest mathematician of all time In science, developed method of working out planetary orbit from three observations and made important studies of electricity and magnetism.

25- *Gay-Lussac, Joseph L.* (1778-1850). French chemist and physicist. Discovered several fundamental laws of gases and was the first to ascend in balloon to make scientific measurements at great heights.

26- *Gibbs, Josiah W.* (1839-1903). American physicist and chemist. Applied principles of thermodynamics to chemistry and founded, in detail, chemical thermodynamics which is the core of modern physical chemistry.

27- *Halley, Edmund* (1656-1742). English astronomer. First to undertake systematic study of southern stars. Worked out the orbits of comets and showed that they were subject to the law of gravitation.

28- *Harvey, William* (1578-1657). English physiologist. First to apply mathematical and experimental methods to biology. Demonstrated the circulation of the blood, overthrowing ancient theories and founding modern physiology.

29- *Heisenberg, Werner* (1901-). German physicist. Enunciated uncertainty principle, a concept of great power in modern physics. Was the first to work out the proton/neutron structure of the atomic nucleus and was thus the founder of modern nucleonics. Nobel Prize, 1933.

30- *Helmholtz, Hermann L. F. von* (1821-1894). German physicist and physiologist. Advanced a theory of color vision and one of hearing, making important studies of light and sound. First to enunciate, clearly and specifically, the law of conservation of energy.

31- *Henry, Joseph* (1797-1878). American physicist. Devised first large scale electromagnet and invented electric relay, which was basis of the telegraph. Invented the electric motor which is the basis of much of modern electrical gadgetry.

32- *Herschel, William* (1738-1822). German-English astronomer. Discovered the planet, Uranus, first to be discovered in historic times. Founded the modern study of stellar astronomy by work on double stars, on proper motions etc. He was the first to attempt to work out the general shape and size of the Galaxy.

33- *Hertz, Heinrich R.* (1857-1894). German physicist. Discov-

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ered radio waves, thus establishing Maxwell's theoretical predictions concerning the electromagnetic spectrum.

34- *Hipparchus* (2nd Century B.C.). Greek astronomer. The greatest of the naked-eye observers of the heavens. Worked out the epicycle theory of the Solar system, with the earth at the center. Perfected system of latitude and longitude, devised first star map, and discovered the procession of the equinoxes.

35- *Hubble, Edwin P.* (1889-1953). American astronomer. His studies of the outer galaxies demonstrated that the universe was expanding. Presented first picture of known universe as a whole.

36- *Hutton, James* (1726-1797). Scottish geologist. Founded modern geology; the first to stress the slow, eons-long, changes of the earth's crust under environmental stresses continuing and measurable in the present.

37- *Huygens, Christian.* (1629-1695). Dutch mathematician, physcist, and astronomer. Devised first pendulum clock, thus founding the art of accurate time-keeping. Improved the telescope and discovered Saturn's rings. Was the first to advance a wave theory of light.

38- *Kekulé von Stradonitz, Friedrich A.* (1829-1896). German chemist. Devised the modern method of picturing organic molecules with bonds representing valence links, of which the carbon atom possessed four. This brought order into the jungle of organic chemistry.

39- *Kelvin, William Thomson, Lord* (1824-1907). Scottish physicist. Proposed absolute scale of temperature, did important theoretical work on electricity, and was one of those who worked out the concept of entropy. (See ORDER! ORDER!, F & SF, February 1961.)

40- *Kepler, Johann* (1571-1630). German astronomer Established elliptical nature of planetary orbits, and worked out generalizations governing their motions. He thus established the modern model of the Solar system and eliminated the epicycles that had governed astronomical thinking for nearly two thousand years.

41- *Kirchhoff, Gustav R.* (1824-1887). German physicist. Applied the spectroscope to chemical analysis, thus founding modern spectroscopy and laying the groundwork for modern astrophysics. He was the first to study black-body radiation, something which led, eventually, to the quantum theory.

42- *Koch, Robert* (1843-1910). German bacteriologist. Isolated bacteria of tuberculosis and of anthrax. Was the first to develop systematic methods for culturing pure strains of bacteria and established rules for locating the infectious agent of a disease. Nobel Prize, 1905.

43- *Laplace, Pierre S.* (1749-1827). French mathematician and

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astronomer. Worked out the gravitational mechanics of the Solar system in detail and showed it to be stable.

44- *Lavoisier, Antoine L.* (1743-1794). French chemist. First to popularize quantitative methods in chemistry. Established the nature of combustion and the composition of the atmosphere. Enunciated the law of conservation of matter. Introduced the modern system of terminology for naming chemical compounds and wrote the first modern chemical textbook. (See SLOW BURN, F & SF, October, 1962.)

45- *Lawrence, Ernest O.* (1901-1958). American physicist. Invented the cyclotron, first device suitable for induction of large-scale artificial nuclear reactions. Modern nuclear physics technology depends upon the cyclotron and its descendants. Nobel Prize, 1939.

46- *Leverrier, Urbain J. J.* (1811-1877). French astronomer. Worked out the calculations that predicted the position of the then-unknown Neptune. This was the greatest victory for gravitational theory and the most dramatic event in the history of astronomy.

47- *Liebig, Justus von* (1803-1873). German chemist. Worked out methods of quantitative analysis of organic compounds. Was the first to study chemical fertilizers intensively and hence is the founder of agricultural chemistry.

48- *Linnaeus, Carolus* (1707-1778). Swedish botanist. Painstakingly classified all species known to himself into genera; placed related genera into orders and related orders into classes, thus founding taxonomy. He devised the system of binomial nomenclature, whereby each species has a general and a specific name.

49- *Maxwell, James C.* (1831-1879). Scottish physicist. Worked out equations that served as basis for an understanding of electromagnetism. Showed light to be an electromagnetic radiation and predicted a range of such radiations beyond those then known. Worked out the kinetic theory of gases, one of the foundation blocks of physical chemistry. (See THE MODERN DEMONOLOGY, F & SF, January, 1962.)

50- *Mendel, Gregor J.* (1822-1884). Austrian botanist. His studies of pea plants founded the science of genetics, though the laws of inheritance he worked out remained unknown in his lifetime. (See THE LOST GENERATION, F & SF, February, 1963.)

51- *Mendeléev, Dmitri I.* (1834-1907). Russian chemist. Worked out the periodic table of the elements, which proved an important unifying concept in chemistry. The value of the table was established by his dramatic prediction of the properties of as-yet-unknown elements.

52- *Michelson, Albert A.* (1852-1931). German-American physicist. Made accurate determinations of velocity of light. Invented the

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interferometer and used it to show that light travels at constant velocity in all directions despite motion of the earth. This served as the foundation of the theory of relativity. Nobel Prize, 1907. (See THE LIGHT THAT FAILED, F & SF, June 1963.)

53- *Moseley, Henry G. J.* (1887-1915). English physicist. Studied x-ray emission by elements and worked out the manner in which nuclear electric charge differed from element to element. This led to the concept of the atomic number which greatly improved the rationale behind the periodic table of the elements.

54- *Newton, Isaac* (1642-1727). English physicist and mathematician. Invented calculus, thus founding modern mathematics. Discovered compound nature of white light, thus founding modern optics. Constructed the first reflecting telescope. Worked out the laws of motions and the theory of universal gravitation, replacing Aristotle's world-system with one that was infinitely better. (See CATCHING UP WITH NEWTON, F & SF, December 1958.)

55- *Ostwald, Friedrich W.* (1853-1932). German physical chemist. Founder of modern physical chemistry. Worked on electrolytic dissociation. Proposed the modern view of catalysis as a surface phenomenon. Nobel Prize, 1909.

56- *Pasteur, Louis* (1822-1895). French chemist. Did pioneer work in stereochemistry. Advanced the germ theory of disease, thus founding modern medicine. He worked out dramatic methods of inoculation against various diseases.

57- *Pauling, Linus C.* (1901-). American chemist. Applied quantum theory to molecular structure, proposing a new and more useful view of the valence bond, and establishing modern theoretical organic chemistry. First to propose the helical structure of large organic molecules, such as proteins, which led on to Crick's work. Nobel Prize, 1954.

58- *Perkin, William H.* (1838-1907). English chemist. Initiated the great days of synthetic organic chemistry by synthesizing Aniline Purple, first of the aniline dyes. Also synthesized coumarin, founding the synthetic perfume industry.

59- *Planck, Max K. E. L.* (1858-1947). German physicist. Worked out quantum theory to explain the nature of black-body radiation. This theory treats energy as discontinuous and as consisting of discrete particles or quanta. The new understanding it offered is so crucial that physics is commonly divided into "classical" (before Planck) and "modern" (since Planck). Nobel Prize, 1918.

60- *Priestley, Joseph* (1733-1804). English chemist. Discovered

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oxygen. (See SLOW BURN, F & SF, October, 1962.)

61- *Roentgen, Wilhelm K.* (1845-1923). German physicist. Discovered x-rays, an event usually considered as initiating the Second Scientific Revolution. Nobel Prize, 1901.

62- *Rutherford, Ernest* (1871-1937). New Zealand-born British physicist. Enunciated the theory of the nuclear atom in which the atom was viewed as containing a tiny central nucleus surrounded by clouds of electrons. This founded sub-atomic physics. Rutherford was the first to effect an artificial nuclear reaction, changing one element into another. Nobel Prize, 1908.

63- *Scheele, Karl W.* (1742-1786). German-Swedish chemist. Discovered or co-discovered some half dozen elements, as well as a variety of organic and inorganic compounds.

64- *Schwann, Theodor* (1810-1882). German zoologist. Discovered first animal enzyme, pepsin. Contributed to the disproof of spontaneous generation. Strongest single contributor to the establishment of the cell theory which is virtually the atomic theory of biology.

65- *Soddy, Frederick* (1877-1956). English chemist. Worked out the isotope theory of the elements and with it the details of the course of radioactive breakdown. Nobel Prize, 1921.

66- *Thales* (640-546 B.C.) Greek philosopher. Founder of science in the sense that he was the first known person to adopt rationalism and drop the supernatural.

67- *Thompson, Joseph J.* (1856-1940). English physicist. First to establish, definitely, that cathode rays consisted of particles far smaller than atom; therefore the discoverer of the electrons and the founder of the study of subatomic particles. Nobel Prize, 1906.

68- *Van't Hoff, Jacobus H.* (1852-1911). Dutch physical chemist. Advanced theory of the tetrahedral carbon atom, by which molecular structure could be described in three dimensions. Contributed greatly to chemical thermodynamics. Nobel Prize, 1901.

69- *Vesalius, Andreas* (1514-1564). Belgian anatomist. Described his anatomical observations in a book with classically beautiful illustration. This demolished ancient errors in anatomy and established the science in its modern form. Published in 1543, it began the Scientific Revolution in the biological sciences.

70- *Virchow, Rudolf* (1821-1902). German pathologist. Studied disease from the cellular standpoint and ranks as the founder of modern pathology. He also labored on behalf of sanitation reform and is one of the founders of modern hygiene.

71- *Volta, Allesandro* (1745-1827). Italian physicist. Built the

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first chemical battery and founded the study of current electricity.

72- *Wohler, Friedrich* (1800-1882). First to form an organic compound (urea) from an inorganic precursor, thus founding modern organic chemistry.

Having completed the list of nominees, I am under the temptation to play with it, analyze it statistically in various fashions. I shall succumb to this in only one small way. Let me list the total number of scientists on the list according (as nearly as I can guess) to the language they thought in.

English	26
German	21
French	7
Italian	4
Greek	4
Swedish	3
Dutch (& Flemish)	3
Polish	2
Danish	1
Russian	1

I suppose this can be taken as evidence that modern science is primarily an Anglo-American-German phenomenon. I think, though, it is more likely to demonstrate that the individual who selected the names is himself English-speaking.

Now there is nothing left for me to do but to list my version of the ten winners of the Isaac Awards. I hope that the Stern Editor will place them on another page* and upside down so that you can prepare your own version (if you choose) without reference to mine. My own list of Isaac Winners is in alphabetical order for I lack the bravery to choose among them (except that I would put Newton first). However, you may list yours in a particular order, if you have the courage.

Please feel free to send your list to me, if you wish. You have the right to disagree and can freely tell me about the men I have included (or excluded) that only a jackass would include (or exclude), either in my list of nominees or in my final list of Isaac Winners.

It's possible you may even enlighten me and change my mind.

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* *See page 128 for the Asimov Isaacs.*

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BOOKS

SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES, Ray Bradbury, Simon and Schuster, $4.95

Comparisons with Charles Finney's *The Circus of Dr. Lao* are inevitable, so I suppose they had better be made right now. *Dr. Lao* is not my favorite of its author's books; I much prefer his *Where The Pavement Ends;* so I can't say (and after a quarter of a century) if I am absolutely sure that he got there with the mostest—but he got there fustest, and I don't think *Something Wicked* will nudge *Dr. Lao* out of its present place as Leading Gothick Novel of the Circus. So much, for nao, for Dr. Lao. This most recent of Bradbury's novels combines two of Bradbury's favorite themes: his deep and undoubtedly sincere love for the Midwestern small town of bygone years, and his fascination with the sideshow (rather, perhaps, than the circus or carnival *per se*) as an antic mirror of the human and inhuman scene. I might really say it weaves in a third favorite Bradbury motif, that of Boyhood. "A three-fold cord is not easily broken," observes Proverbs, and those multitudes who love Ray Bradbury's writings on any theme and with a warm and uncritical love, will certainly be enchanted and swept away. I would hazard that this is true of Bradbury-prone reader-types. Both groups will probably devour it whole at one ensorceled sitting. Those to whom Ray Bradbury's name is like bandilleras to a bull will, of course, charge and trample the book down with shouts of triumph to the effect that he is repeating himself, that he has become the prisoner of his own style, that he comes perilously close to self-parody. But there is a third alignment, in which I find myself. I would gladly be once again in the first category, if I could. I acknowledge some measure of truth in the shouts of the second. But there remains so much that is rich and strange, so much that awakens echoes of the uncritical, magical, Bradburian past, in this book—this book about thirteen-year old comrades Jim Nightshade and Will Halloway, and of the devilish and timeless travelling show—and it is so much of an improvement in construction

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over *Dandelion Wine* (the previous Ray Bradbury novel)—that I justify my pleasure and allay my discomfort with this: Bradbury has not yet mastered the technique of the novel, as he has more than mastered that of the short story, but there is hope and evidence here that he will. It would be more than a shame if we were to be disappointed.

THE EARTH AND YOU, **Norman J. G. Pounds**, Rand McNally, $6.95

This is an excellent popular work on geography, clearly written, well illustrated, copiously mapped and diagrammed; and is literate as well as being technically competent. Space ships *go bragh* —but we are still living on this globe of Earth, and most of us will go on doing so for quite some time. There's always more to learn about it, and Dr. Pounds's book provides a pleasant way of doing so. I was interested to observe the old map firm's extension into book publishing. If THE EARTH AND YOU is a good sample of their new wares, I'd like to see more of them.

ANALOG 1, **John W. Campbell**, ed., Doubleday, $3.95

These eight stories form the first collection taken from *Analog* (formerly *Astounding*) magazine since it became such. The predictably unpredictable John Campbell is one of the Prime Movers of modern SF, and most of his Moving has been done through the magazine which he has edited for a quarter-century. It is obvious that his many readers must like what they get—there are so many of them. What they *don't* get, in this octave at least, is a single specimen of either fresh ideas or fresh writing. The best of the lot (and not very best at that) is Teddy Keller's short, crisp *The Plague*—something like Berton Rouché's disease-detective articles for *The New Yorker;* and Winston P. Sander's *Barnacle Bull*—competent technological space fiction. Christopher Anvil's *The Hunch* is noteworthy chiefly for a concluding paragraph which, philosophically speaking, is pure Campbell:

> [. . .] Logic has to do with chains of individual facts. Intuition takes whole groups of facts at once. You can recognize a familiar pattern—like a familiar face—even though you *don't* consciously know all the details. Sometimes it's a mistake, but then you can often use logic as a check. With intuition you see it; with logic you check it.

Other contributors are Lloyd Biggle, T. R. Fehrenbach, Sterling E. Lanier, Gordon R. Dickson, and Leigh Richmond.

ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO U.S. MISSILES AND ROCKETS, **Stanley M. Ulanoff**, Doubleday, $3.95

This is the "New Revised Edition" of the "Factual Album of

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Rockets For War And Peace." Despite the optimism of the last word it appears that United Parcels is not yet using these devices for its delivery service. A good part of our national income, which might be used to find a cure for cancer, is going to build these ingenious and deadly engines so we might as well know what they look like. Here they are, 65 of them, with photos and scale drawings and thumbnail data on "power plant, propellant, dimensions, guidance, speed, range, and ceiling"—plus brief history (Ulanoff quotes Von Braun to the effect that the real father of modern rocketry was Professor Goddard of Clark University) in general and particular.

THE SHIP OF FOOLS, Sebastian Brant, Dover, $2.00 (paperbound)

Not the current novel of the same name but the medieval classic, translated into rhyming couplets by Edwin Zeydel, and illustrated with the original woodcuts. THE SHIP OF FOOLS may be roughly and remotely compared with The Divine Comedy; earlier than Erasmus, it might be subtitled *In Contempt of Folly*. Old Brant was an Alsatian who studied and taught in Switzerland, his swinging sallies at *narren* of all sorts (boasters, borrowers, gamblers, gluttons—110 varieties of fools) have not become altogether obsolete. Number 75, "Of Bad Marksmen," might be pondered with profit by modern day missile-men: "If you shoot for elimination/ You must use wise discrimination/ Aim straight and not too low or high/ If you would strike the target's eye,/ *And shun an all-too hasty try.*" From Number 65: ". . . superstitious fancy,/ Palm-reading, e'en ornithomancy, Or symbols, signs, and books of dreams,/ Or search for things by Luna's beams/ Or black arts done with pomp and show. [. . .] Such things go scot-free, are believed,/ *The whole world wants to be deceived.*" It still does, but is using another dream-book nowadays.

THE SOLAR SYSTEM, OUR NEW FRONT YARD, Clifford D. Simak, St. Martin's, $4.50

We asked this for review, not realizing that it is "for young readers." Mr. Simak, besides being a well-known writer of SF, is News Editor and science-fact columnist of the *Minneapolis Star;* young readers of the (illustrated) book will get the current and standard information* without condescension.

*(Life did not, after all, drift here via spores—radiation would have killed them off; the asteroids are probably not the results of a blown-up planet: more likely the leftovers from the raw material for one, etc.)

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MAN AND DOLPHIN, John C. Lilly, Pyramid, 75¢

This companion volume to *The Kingdom of the Octopus* (reviewed F&SF, June 1963) is not so rich in anecdotal material, but is of far greater importance than the other. By now just about everyone not a guest at a State Industrial School has heard of current scientific attempts to communicate via intelligent speech with dolphins and porpoises. Dr. Lilly is the chief man at this endeavor, and has written a rewarding and stimulating book about it. These smaller cetaceans seem capable of learning as fast as humans, of mimicking human speech, to possess a complex language of their own "with predictive and descriptive values", to attack sharks but never man; their behavior in the wild and in captivity indicates an almost incredibly high level of intelligence. Their cousins, the killer whales, evidence most strongly suggests, can send complex "messages" over a 50-sq. mi. area in half an hour! Dr. Lilly is aware of the dangers of "anthropomorphizing", or attributing human intentions or qualities to animals. He warns against the counter-tendency of "zoomorphizing", or attributing the qualities of small-brained creatures to large-brained ones—such as porpoises. They live in the sea, a world still so largely alien to us; they do not "make" anything—they have no artifacts; their brains, bodies, mode of life . . . multiply the list indefinitely . . . are infinitely different than ours. In the terms of some religions, they have no souls. The attempt to "communicate" seems almost absurd. Presumptuous. But it proceeds, and has obtained what may be termed, with caution, a measure of success which encourages hopes of more. In practical terms, if we and the dolphins can "talk", they can help us in a variety of ways ranging from aiding plane crash and shipwreck victims, to gathering scientific data about "fisheries, oceanography, marine biology, navigation, linguistics, various sciences of the brain, and space." What we learn from and about and with these "aliens" may help us in future contacts with extra-terrestrial "aliens." So much, and likely more, the dolphins can do for us. What can we do for the dolphins? Dr. Lilly doesn't say, and I can think of only one thing, myself. We can leave them the Hell alone.

SCIENCE IN THE CAUSE OF MAN, Gerard Piel, Knopf, $5.95

This is the "Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged" of a collection of essays and articles by the publisher of the *Scientific American*. Stylistically, they do not exactly skim along the main, but neither does the dull wheel labor nor the line grind slow. And his

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approach—combining hard science, social science, history, politics, and economics—is a worthwhile one.

THE NIGHT SHAPES, **James Blish,** Ballantine, 50¢

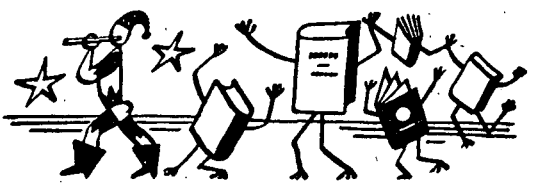
May be taken straight by fans of Burroughs, Rider Haggard, or the A. Conan Doyle of the Prof. Challenger stories; or read and enjoyed as a spoof by the incurably sceptical.

ERROR AND ECCENTRICITY IN HUMAN BELIEF, **Joseph Jastrow,** Dover, $1.98

This is a reprint of the 1935 edition, then entitled *Wish and Wisdom, Episodes in the Vagaries of Belief*. Among the false sciences, odd-ball theories, impostures, frauds, etc., which Jastrow brings up only to put down, are: the Masonic hoax of "Leo Taxil", which fooled a Pope; the faked "fossils" of Professor Beringer; the Devil mania; Casper Hauser; the magnetic cult; Madame Blavatsky; the ouija board; horses who spell and do sums; phrenology, psychometry, ectoplasm; and many others. This is indeed a very interesting book, but it is more interesting for the reportorial material than for what Jastrow has to say about it. Indeed, I could have wished that Jastrow had reported more—and used less space telling us how silly are things whose silliness we can see for ourselves. Just drag in the dead dogs, professor, stand back and let us look and smell. You needn't bother beating them—they are already dead. Many interesting illustrations.

THE UNKNOWN, **D. R. Bensen,** ed., Pyramid, 50¢

A paperback collection from the classical fantasy magazine, *Unknown* (aka *Unknown Worlds*) which flourished briefly in the '40s under John Campbell's editorship. It should be sufficient to say that there are illustrations by Edd Cartier, and equally classical stories by Sturgeon, Kuttner, de Camp, Leiber, Gold, Bond, Arthur, Brown, Boucher, Wellman, and Jameson. Go thou and buy.



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As of this writing, the recent boom in fall-out shelters seems to have died not merely down but out, and we should like to think it will produce no more than a footnote in future histories—say, as much space as will be devoted to the miniature golf craze of the early Thirties—or, more comparably, to the anti-poison gas shelters of the late Thirties. While it lasted, however, it produced a wide range of reaction (the White House, Ann Landers, everybody, it seems, got into the act) . . . and also, stories. If you have neighbors like the Bagshaws—and even if you haven't—you will be interested in what Will Stanton (THE SCARECROW OF TOMORROW [F&SF, June, 1962], THE GUMDROP KING [F&SF, August, 1962]) has to tell about their Forethought, their Perseverance, and their Reward.

AS LONG AS YOU'RE HERE

by Will Stanton

When Enid and Walter Bagshaw decided to build a bomb shelter, it went without saying that they would have the best. There was no shortage of money.

"After all," as Walter said, "if a thing is worth doing at all—"

"It's worth doing well," Enid finished up for him. She put down her pick and seized Walter by the hand. There was no need for words. At this point they had reached a depth of 38 feet.

Walter had hired an excavating contractor three weeks before, but he had left at noon the first day. "Good riddance," Walter said. "If a chap can't take suggestions, if he doesn't want his mistakes pointed out, then I don't want him around." He fingered his moustache, "From here on we'll have to go it alone, old girl."

Enid folded the needlepoint on which she had been working at the time, and tucked it into the sewing basket. Then she seized a shovel and commenced loading the wheelbarrow—a simple gesture, yet meaningful.

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As the days passed, Walter found to his surprise that he was enjoying the project. He had never quite been able to find his proper niche in life—there had seemed to be no place for him in politics, the business world or the arts. Yet he proved to be a good mechanic, quickly mastering such things as pumps, pulleys, and the simpler laws of engineering.

He got a keen satisfaction in meeting the challenges of ventilation, earth removal, water control and the like. And Enid, although she had no great powers of inventiveness or imagination, was quick to follow his lead—even occasionally suggesting some small improvement. "I don't know anything about these matters," she might say, "but do you suppose if you put that brace over there on the other side it might work better?"

And Walter, considering judiciously, might give his slow nod. "Don't know what I'd do without you, my girl."

"Don't think about it," Enid would reply.

Often, pausing in their labors, they would take time to think about the meaning of it all. "Do you think it's bound to come?" Enid asked one time. "You think the peace won't last?"

"Never has," Walter said. "Well, we have only ourselves to blame."

"Ourselves?"

"I mean the country," he said, "not you and me. It's gotten so the natural leaders don't have any voice in the government. It always happens—give the vote to every Tom, Dick and Harry and they'll vote for their own kind. Maybe it will be a good thing when it does come."

"Walter, you mean—"

"Exactly. Get rid of the cities. Leave the country to people who have the means and the foresight to protect themselves. People like us. We shall be the parents of a new race." Enid and Walter were childless after eleven years of marriage, but they seemed to feel that when the bomb came she would start having children.

"How much deeper do you intend to go?" she asked. They had reached a depth of 80 feet.

"The radiation will have an effect on future generations," Walter said. "We can't be too careful. When Japan was bombed, the scientists agreed that the greatest damage wouldn't be apparent for several years."

"But they keep manufacturing things faster and cheaper than we can," Enid said. "Japanese stocks are all going up."

He patted her arm. "Don't worry your pretty head over such things."

When they reached 102 feet, Walter lowered the dining room table and chairs into the shelter. "Just because we have to rough it a bit doesn't mean we should lose

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sight of the niceties," he observed. From then on all their meals were eaten by candlelight.

"I daresay it gets a little lonely for you at times," Walter said, "I hope you don't mind too much."

"I don't mind a bit," she replied, "as long as you're here."

"I feel the same," he said, "as long as you're here." They clasped hands. This became a special saying for them. Whenever anything went wrong—whenever there was a new hardship to face they would repeat the words—"as long as you're here" and all would be right again.

At 240 feet they transferred the last of their possessions from the house. "Mrs. Jones from across the street was asking about you," Walter said. Enid hadn't been to the surface in several weeks.

"There's something that's been bothering me," she said. "Nobody else in the neighborhood is building a shelter. And you know what it said in the paper. If your neighbors come and try to get in your shelter you should shoot them."

Walter laughed fondly. "You're getting to be a regular little fuss budget," he said, "always worried about something." He opened the door of the trophy case which was standing nearby. "This isn't the sort of thing a gentleman ordinarily discusses, but as you see I have a number of cups for marksmanship. If it comes to that, you're a better shot than most men. And we have plenty of ammunition."

"I'm sorry," she said, "I should have trusted you." She hesitated—"There is one other thing—I suppose I'm being foolish again—"

"Who has a better right?" Walter inquired.

"Well—there is a saying that one should save the last bullet for oneself. And I was wondering—"

Walter smiled. "It won't come to that. And even if it should, I've taken extra precautions. I was saving this as a surprise—however—" He picked up a wooden box from the floor and put it on the piano bench. "Go ahead—open it."

Enid did. "They look familiar," she said, "I wonder if they aren't something I've seen on television?"

"They're grenades," Walter said, taking one up. "You pull this little ring—no, not now—and then you throw it. Now promise me you won't worry any more."

"I won't," she said, "as long as you're here."

They stopped digging at 305 feet. Walter decided they had gone deep enough. For half a day they sat around and talked. Then they started digging again. It was no longer a means of survival—it had become a way of life.

After a time they observed that the deeper they went in the shaft the higher the temperature became. Enid remarked about this phenomenon.

"Yes," Walter said, "the lower

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you go the warmer it gets and vice versa. You remember when we used to go to the mountains how cool it always was?"

Enid said, "I thought that was because of the snow."

He smiled patiently. "It's based on a simple principle. You see when air is warmed it expands which makes it lighter and causes it to rise."

She frowned. "But if hot air goes up and we get warmer as we go down—"

He reached over and touseled her hair affectionately. "Why don't you let me worry about such matters?"

Sometimes in their long evenings they would speak of their friends and of life on the outside.

"Walter," Enid said on one of these occasions, "you do think the newspaper was right about shooting your neighbors if they try to come in? You don't think there could be any exceptions?"

"Who were you thinking of?" he asked slowly.

"John and Agnes," she said. "You know the couple who work for the Petersons. She's a marvelous cook—besides she used to work as a hairdresser."

Walter said, "I'm sorry."

"If it should happen," she went on, "good help would be harder than ever to find. John could look after your clothes. In fact he can do just about everything. He was even a golf pro at one time."

Walter frowned. "A golf pro, you say?"

"What do you think, Walter? We have plenty of room—plenty of provisions. If we do have to start all over—if we're going to be the pioneers of the future—well, it won't seem quite so bad if we have a couple of really good servants."

Walter sighed. "It's quite true, what you say. But at a time like this we can't be selfish. We must think of the future. We can't make any exceptions."

She nodded slowly. "You're right of course. I think I knew it all along. It was just a sort of dream I had and now it's gone." She gave him a tremulous smile. "If I happen to be a little sad at

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times, I hope you won't mind."

He patted her shoulder. "I understand."

It was shortly after this that they discovered the tunnel. They had been working through a vein of loose shale when they came to what appeared to be a ledge of rock. After they had uncovered a larger section of it, however they discovered it was masonry.

"Now what's all this?" Walter asked. "A tunnel going across my property."

"Perhaps someone else digging a shelter," Enid suggested.

"We'll soon find out," Walter promised and seizing the pick he commenced battering at the surface until he had made a sizeable hole in it. Peering through he saw a kind of passageway—feebly lighted and greatly overheated.

"Well," he said, "we'd better see what's going on here." He slipped a pistol into his pocket and lowered himself through the hole. Reaching up he helped Enid scramble down beside him. Hand in hand they walked to the end of the passage and then stopped in amazement. Before them was a vast chamber, smoky and dim, filled with people scurring back and forth. Seated at a table, issuing orders was a man wearing a black cape.

"You'll have to find room for another 50,000 on the E. level," he was saying to one of his subordinates. He leafed rapidly through an enormous registration book in front of him. "And hurry it up—they're going to start arriving in seven and a half minutes."

He glanced up as Enid and Walter approached. "What in home are you doing here?" he demanded, his eyes fiery. "I'm understaffed as it is—I can't spare the time to process non-scheduled arrivals."

"I might ask what you're doing here," Walter said, "on my property."

"Oh, it's you." He scratched his jaw thoughtfully. "You know you weren't due for another seven minutes. However—" he swiveled the register to face Walter and handed him a pen, "as long as you're here—"

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Here is another one of the beautifully dryly-witty stories which are the trademark of Ron Goulart. This one says dry and witty things about exurban living, modern folk-art, Hollywood, marital happiness, a Strange Thing From The Sea . . . and Max Kearny, Psychic Investigator. You may never be able to believe in any of these things ever again.

McNAMARA'S FISH

by Ron Goulart

THE BEACH ON THE OTHER SIDE of the fence sloped down slowly to the quiet ocean. Max Kearny waited but no one came to warn him about trespassing. He braced himself with one hand against the redwood boards of the fence and took off his shoes and socks. He tied the laces together and hung the shoes around his neck.

The sand was warm, streaked with bright pebbles and broken seashells. Max walked down beyond the scrub topped dunes and then kept parallel with the ocean. A seagull came walking toward him, then angled away as though it were crossing a street to avoid him. The surf hissed in and then slid away and the clam holes popped all along the wet sand.

Standing in a windless cove between low sand hills was a painter's easel. An empty canvas chair fluttered gently in front of the easel and a wooden paint box sat open on the ground near it. Max crossed the sand and looked at the painting. The small canvas showed several men in red mackinaws doing something to rows of trees. Max leaned closer. The men were hanging up syrup buckets probably. In the background among the stick straight trees a horse and buggy was passing.

Max turned from the picture and lit a cigarette. He'd seen a whole wall of pictures like this yesterday in Hollywood at one of the newer art galleries. They were by somebody who signed herself Aunt Jenny and would cost you $1000 each. Aunt Jenny's favorite motif was sapbuckets, with an occasional snow storm thrown in.

"Hello, Max."

Max turned again. Standing next to the painting was Joan McNamara. She was a tall blonde

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girl, deeply tanned now, wearing white shorts and a blue denim shirt. "I saw an easel," Max said, "I thought maybe it was yours."

Joan frowned. "What made you think that?"

"You still are an artist, aren't you?"

"Yes," she said, smiling. "It's good to see you, Max. What is it—two years?"

"Since you and Ken moved down here from San Francisco."

"You're still with the same agency and all up there?" Joan sat down in the canvas chair, angling it to face Max.

"Yeah. That's why I'm down here. To watch them tape some commercials I did the storyboards for." He dropped his shoes down on the sand. "You said you had a problem."

"I was so glad when you phoned us and said you were down for a week. You still do have your hobby?"

"The occult business," said Max. "Yes."

A gate slammed and then two people appeared, coming toward Max and Joan. One was a tall young man in white duck pants and a pullover cablestitch sweater. With him was an old woman in a flowered silk dress. Her hair was tinted pale blue and she wore an LA Dodgers baseball cap over it.

"Mrs. Willsey and Val," Joan said to them. "This is our friend, Max Kearney. He's an artist, too. Max, Mrs. Willsey and her son, Val Willsey."

Max shook hands with Val.

"Mother is Aunt Jenny," Val said, grinning at the half done painting.

"I've seen her work," said Max.

"Do you paint also?" asked Mrs. Willsey, taking the canvas chair Joan stood to give her.

"No," said Max. "I'm just an art director in an ad agency."

"Sold out?" said Val.

"We didn't have maple trees where I grew up," said Max.

"I didn't touch a brush until I was past forty three," said Mrs. Willsey. "That was more years ago than I'd care to have you guess. Now I do at least three canvases a week."

"Mother's having a one man show at the Alch Gallery on La-Cienega next month."

"At first I simply copied colored photos from the magazines," said Mrs. Willsey. "Once I even copied the creation of the world from Life magazine. Now, of course, I utilize my own girlhood for subject matter. Paint what you know."

Joan caught Max' arm. "Max will be staying with Ken and me over the weekend. I imagine you'd like a drink or something, Max, after driving all the way from Hollywood to Osodoro Beach."

"Fine," said Max.

They said goodbye to Aunt Jenny and her son and started back

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across the beach toward the house Joan and Ken McNamara were living in.

"The place is awful, isn't it?" Joan said.

"No. But it's big as hell."

"At least it's not Moorish."

"It's whose house? Ken's dad's?"

"Ewen McNamara himself, yes. He's retired from the movie business and living in Arizona. He gave us the damn place more or less."

"What's Ken doing?"

Joan shrugged. "He doesn't have a job right now. I'm doing pretty well. Freelancing ad stuff and selling a painting now and then."

"I thought Ken had somebody to finance the boat."

"Boat?"

"You wrote he was going to prove Heyerdahl wrong and do something in the Pacific with a raft."

"Oh, yes. No, Ken decided not to. All the bomb tests out there and all. He thought he'd be arrested as a pacifist." Joan stopped and pointed at a driftwood log. "Let's sit there for a minute. I take it you didn't find Ken back at the house?"

"No. Nobody. I decided to look for you on the beach."

Joan sat on the log and stretched her legs straight out in front of her. "Now, Max, you've made a lifetime study of the supernatural."

"No," said Max, sitting beside her. "Only the past couple of years."

"Well, you know enough." She spread her fingers wide and slid her hands down her legs to her knees. Rocking slightly she said, "Living by the ocean has been quite a thing."

"You've picked up quite a tan."

"Ken, too. Wait till you see him. No, but, what I mean is that especially at night there's something about the ocean. You know. You've read all the stuff about the mysteries of the deep and the poems what's his name Arnold and John Masefield wrote."

"I like Popeye, too. Is what's bothering you the ocean?"

"You mustn't talk to Ken about this."

"Okay I guess."

"We have separate bedrooms now, you know."

"It wasn't in the papers."

"I mean we've been having all sorts of disagreements and such."

"I'm sorry."

"When Ken was doing the masks he got the idea he'd like to work nights and it developed into his using one of the spare bedrooms as a workshop and finally just sleeping there, too."

"Masks?"

"He met a fellow in Caliente who sold him two hundred masks, the kind they make down there, for fifty dollars. Ken had the idea he'd make lamps out of them. With sombreros for shades. The

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lightbulbs made them catch fire, though, and he gave it up."

"And the trouble?"

"He's having an affair with a mermaid."

Max stood up, dropping his shoes. "This isn't one of his projects? This is something he's actually doing?"

Joan said, "Yes, I'm afraid so." She put one hand over her eyes like a visor. "I thought maybe you could investigate."

"Like Peekaboo Pennington and get flash pictures?" Max knelt in the sand. "What gave you these suspicions about a mermaid?"

"Well," said Joan. "About two months ago I became aware that Ken was slipping out at night. He didn't take the car and if anyone picked him up I'd hear that, too. He'd be gone sometimes for hours. When I'd get his clothes ready to wash I'd find sand in the cuffs and seaweed smears. I know he goes down to the beach in the middle of the night, Max."

"If he goes with you in the daytime couldn't that be how he gets the sand and stuff?"

"Allright. I made a special point of checking. He wears warmer clothes at night and in the morning there's sand all over them."

"And how come it's got to be a mermaid he's meeting?"

"You know Ken's father had a lot of the things from his movie studio moved here when it closed down," Joan said. "In fact, we have all those out buildings full of stuff. But in the house there's the library. All kinds of obscure books that McNamara Studios had in their research department. A whole wall of books on the occult. I know Ken's been reading them lately. I found out which books he's been taking off the shelves. The books are all on the subject of mermaids."

"Whole books on mermaids?"

"And related subjects," said Joan. "He's involved with some sea woman."

"You've never tried to follow him? Or asked him about it?"

"I'm afraid to follow him," Joan said. "And asking him outright would only lead to a great debate."

"I didn't know you and Ken were," began Max.

"Growing apart? Since we moved in here it's been advancing. This place and Ken's not having a job. You're sure going to have a fun-filled weekend." Joan shook her head. "These past two months, though, Max, it's been different. The way Ken's acting. I know it's not just some other woman. It's a mermaid."

Max put his hands in his pockets and watched the seagulls skim along over the water.

"Max?"

"Yes?"

"If Ken asks say I came out here with you. Don't mention the Willseys unless you have to."

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"I don't have to."

Joan smiled hopefully at him. "You'll figure everything out, Max. I know."

"Sure," Max said. He didn't smile back at her.

The tapestries that hung stiffly down between the shelves in the library were faded and cryptic.

"What?" Ken McNamara said to Max.

"I was wondering what battle the tapestries represent," Max said, casually moving near the shelf Joan had nodded at earlier.

"I don't know," said Ken. "Something that Tyrone Power fought in. They're all props from one of my dad's pictures."

Things fell over in the kitchen.

Ken put his drink on a gargoyle legged table and went to the doorway. "You okay out there, Joan?"

"Where'd you put the wine vinegar?" his wife called.

Ken hesitated. "We're all out," he called back finally.

Max lit a cigarette and looked up at the rows of occult books.

"Listen, Max," said Ken.

"Yeah?"

"Wait." Ken closed the cherub covered door. "You do detective work, don't you?"

"Only occult stuff. As a hobby."

"No hard-boiled things?"

"I beat a werwolf two falls out of three last fall."

"I mean the usual sleezy private op work."

"Divorce and motel?"

"Joan's having an affair," Ken said, walking by the row of German Renaissance beersteins on the mantle and tapping each one with his forefinger.

"Oh, so?" Max looked around for an ashtray.

"Use the mummy case over there," said Ken. "She sneaks out at night."

Max lifted the lid of the flat lying case that rested on a wrought iron stand near the fireplace. "The mummy does?" The case was half filled with cigarette butts. He added his and dropped the lid.

"No, for Christ sake, Joan. She's slipping around. And you know where she goes?"

"Sleeping around is the phrase."

"Whatever. You know where she goes?"

"Down to the beach?"

"No. Over to visit this guy named Val Willsey. A beach boy type. Lives in the estate next door with his mother. I'm sure Joan's seeing him." He stopped and scowled at Max. "What's the matter with you anyway? This is serious."

Max lit a new cigarette. "What's the matter with you? Back in San Francisco you and Joan always looked like House Beautiful's couple of the month."

"Do they have a couple of the month?"

"I'll check with media. Now what the hell is wrong?"

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Ken sat down in a leather chair. "I don't know. The last year things have been going wrong. Since I lost the Orange Rupert concession."

"Orange Rupert?"

"The soft drink they sell along the highways in stands that look like oranges with a window in them. I had one two miles from here, on 101 just outside of Osodoro. But they took it away from me. I was showing a profit, too."

"Why?"

"The orange started to peel."

"Come on."

"The paint did. Kept coming off the damn thing. All the other damn Orange Ruper orange's were orange. Mine was rusty silver. It wouldn't stay orange."

Max took a book from a shelf. "Have you seen Joan over there with this Willsey guy?"

"No. I'm not a sneak, Max."

"But you've got a hunch, huh?"

"Right."

"Mermaids And Other Creatures Encountered By A Norwegian Whaling Captain," Max said, reading the title of the weathered book. "You read any of these?"

Ken blinked. "No. No, I don't. That's more your kind of crap." He rose. "Now about Joan."

The door of the library swung open. "Well," said Joan, "there's no vinegar. But, such as it is, dinner's ready. Okay?"

"Sure," said Ken. "See if you recognize the dining room table, Max. they used it in a picture my dad made with Douglas Fairbanks."

Max put the mermaid book back on the shelf and followed Joan and Ken down the high shadowy corridor to the dining room.

Everything was white with moonlight. The untended shrubs, the vast unclipped lawns and the great unclassifiable McNamara house. Max was sitting in a clump of damp ferns with his hands cupped over the bright tip of his cigarette. Far down hill the ocean made low tumbling sounds.

The gabled part of the house roof had a clock steeple stuck on one of its peeks. The clock showed one AM. The darkness in among the shrubbery was dotted with frog calls and cricket chirps. Max felt his eyes start to close. He exhaled smoke and then took several deep breaths of the cold night air. He shook his head and widened his eyes. Finally he got himself almost awake again.

A dark figure appeared on the wide marble steps that wound down from the Dutch door at the side of the house. The figure moved off down the driveway, heading for the out buildings. It was Ken.

This didn't seem right. Max ground his cigarette into the dirt. He'd picked this side of the house to watch because it faced the ocean.

But Ken wasn't heading for the

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beach. Max followed, keeping off the driveway gravel as much as he could.

There were a half dozen dissimilar buildings on the grounds behind the main house. One looked like a Gothic cathedral built to the scale of a motel cottage. Another was a large two story building that looked something like a Midwest bank. Between these two was an Arabian Nights sort of building, the size of a tract home. Ken went into this one. Max had the impression that Ken was carrying a package carefully in front of him.

Cutting down a flagstone path Max edged along the side of the Arabian structure. Flickering light showed at its horseshoe shaped windows.

Directly behind this building was one that resembled an airplane hanger. Piled in front of it was a tangled assortment of chairs. Max picked three that seemed still in fair shape, hoping they weren't some of McNamara's break-away furniture. In among a nest of Georgian dining room chairs Max found some spare table boards.

Back under the arched window he put a board between two chairs and put the third chair on top of the board. He climbed up on the whole thing.

A lantern and brass lamp were burning in the room below. The whole place was full of props from old McNamara's Eastern pictures. Piles of wrought iron doors and stacks of gilt trellises. Scatterings of peacock feathers and patterned silks, brass gongs and silver censers. In the center of all the confusion of worn out background pieces was an actual pool. It was large, its water a filmy green. Bordering it was real sand and jungle shrubbery. On a prop rock at the pool's edge was Ken, sitting with a salad bowl in his lap.

Ken dipped his hand into the bowl and brought out a handful of what seemed to be shrimp salad.

"I got the wine vinegar for it this time, LJ," Ken said.

"Mr. LJ is in conference," said a rasping voice. "He suggests you make an appointment."

"You're still on this kick LJ?"

"*Mr.* LJ."

"Anyway, I made an appointment this afternoon. Remember?"

"We'll consult our appointment pad."

Max strained to see what it was that was talking from the pool.

"I can't wait around here all night, LJ. Come off it."

"Do you good to cool your heels in the waiting room for awhile. We can find no record of your appointment. What was the nature of your business with Mr. LJ?"

"You're supposed to fix things up between Joan and me."

"Full names please. Last name first and please print."

"How can I print when I'm talking?"

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"Perhaps you'd like to take your business to one of our competitors?"

"I'll take the shrimp, too, if you don't shape up," said Ken. "What kind of water spirit are you if you can't even do any magic?"

There was a splashing at the darkest end of the pool and something swam toward Ken. "Who said I was a water spirit?" A fat blue fish nearly a foot and a half high pulled itself up on the rock with Ken. The pulling was easy because the fish had arms and legs. "You sure it's wine vinegar?"

"Yes."

LJ jabbed a blue hand into the salad bowl and began eating. "Not as good as a commissary, but it'll do."

"If you aren't a water spirit, what are you?"

"Mr. LJ is all you have to know."

"I've looked through all my dad's damned books on this sort of thing. And I can't quite pin you down."

"McNamara was strictly a shlep," said LJ, finishing the salad.

"And how come you're talking like this lately?"

"So why shouldn't I?" said LJ. "I've been all up and down the coast here."

"You didn't talk that way when I found you on the beach."

"So I should be consistent just to impress a third-rate creep like you."

"Okay, forget it, LJ," said Ken. "I know you have magic powers."

"How else did I get so far. Besides sheer guts, I owe the rest to magic. Out in the ocean it's dog eat dog. You don't stay on top for three hundred years just on luck."

"Isn't one of your powers the ability to tell what's going on?"

"Sure. Like now I'm sitting here with you."

"In places other than here. You can tell me where Joan goes when she sneaks off."

"It's possible I could," said LJ, more or less sitting down and crossing his legs.

"And you could work some kind of spell to make her stop her affair."

"So why not."

"It's been over seven weeks since I brought you here. And the results haven't been much so far."

"I tell you, Ken baby, Rome wasn't built in a day. Not even by DeMille. So don't be anxious. We'll work us out something. Meanwhile, before you make an appointment for tomorrow you should locate some lobster for yours truly." The blue fish stood up and stretched its arms. "Excuse it, I've had a tough day."

"Lobster?"

"I can maybe see you tomorrow morning around eleven, Ken sweetie. See you around the lot." LJ dived back into the pool.

Max let himself silently down to the ground. He waited until the

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lights went out and he saw Ken cutting back toward the house. Then he put the chairs and boards back.

The front door of the house clicked quietly and Joan, with her hands tight in the pockets of a grey belted raincoat, came out into the night. Max stopped moving. He had been coming around from the out buildings and he halted now in a scattering of lemon trees.

Joan ran across the tangled grounds and vanished in among a blurred labyrinth of hedges at the far end of the place.

Dropping his cigarette butt into the Grecian urn near the sundial, Max followed Joan.

The hedges gave way finally to a spike topped iron fence. Up across a half acre or more of close cropped lawn sat the Willsey house. Max spotted Joan, a black silhouette bobbing, moving toward the house.

Max wiped his palms on his pants and got a grip on the black wrought iron bars. He got himself over, tearing only one cuff.

Joan went down an arbored path and into a Spanish style guest house. Its lights came on.

Max came up and looked in the window. Joan had taken off her coat and was putting on a smock. She had a canvas set up on an easel and, as Max watched, she started painting.

Max went away finally, puzzled. For some reason Joan was ghosting paintings for Aunt Jenny. She even had a real sap bucket up to use as a model.

Max bent a match folder open and snapped it between the pages of the thick book. He set it aside and opened another book. He had a hunch what LJ was and he hoped the occult books in the McNamara collection would provide him with more specifics.

The morning sun was bright at the library windows now and the chill of the room was lifting. There was a soft knock on the door and Joan came in. Her hair was tied back and she had on a blue robe. "Did you see her?"

"Who?" said Max, making another book ark.

"The mermaid," Joan said, sitting across from him.

The mantel clock struck eleven and a team of allegorical figures popped out. Max waited until they'd gone indoors again and then he said, "Are you working for the Willseys?"

"Who said that?"

"I saw you-over there last night. Painting one of those god awful Aunt Jenny abortions."

"Your bloodhound instincts really ran wild. It's Ken your supposed to watch."

"The sea air keyed me up. I got such a kick out of following him I decided to track you, too."

"There's nothing supernatural

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about what I'm doing," Joan said. The lace of her slip showed along the robe edge and she tracked its pattern with her finger. "I wanted to get some kind of money ahead. So we wouldn't have to depend on Ken's father. Mrs. Willsey asked me to help her on one of her paintings. That was four or five months ago. Aunt Jenny likes the fun of painting. Laying it out and finishing it up tire her. I've painted at least part of all her things. Lately I ghost whole paintings."

"Then it's you who's responsible for the Aunt Jenny boom down here."

"Probably. Anyway I got 40% of everything I do. I opened an account in a bank in Santa Monica." Joan noticed her moving hand and stopped it. She dropped both hands in her lap. "But what did you find out about Ken?"

"Is he around?"

"No. He drove off early. He's not back yet. Didn't you trail him this morning?"

"I overslept," said Max. "There is something."

"Something?"

"A fish."

"Ken's having an affair with a fish?"

"No he's trying to get advice from the fish."

Joan turned toward the window. "That's the car coming back. What fish? What sort of advice? He's not still worried about the lighthouse business? The company said they'd refund the deposit because you can't get to the island except by autogiro."

"Let's just limit it to this fish. No other projects."

"Is the fish in the ocean? Does Ken visit it there?"

"No. It's in that Arabian looking building out back. In the pool."

"What sort of fish is it, Max? A shark or something dangerous."

"A little blue fish with arms and legs. It talks and does magic."

Joan shook her head. "I don't understand. I've never heard of . . ." There was a great cloud of yellow smoke suddenly around Joan. Then a loud explosion.

"Joan." Max jumped for her chair.

The chair teetered and slammed over sideways. Joan was gone.

Max spun around. The room was empty, the door still closed.

Max opened it and ran out into the hall. The house was quiet. Max went out the side door that led back to the out buildings.

Coming down the path toward him was Ken.

"Did you give the lobster to LJ?" Max said, pulling up.

"Had to drive all the way to Santa Monica for it but I—who told you about LJ?"

"Joan just vanished."

"Off with Val Willsey probably. Or maybe just shopping," said Ken. "I'm willing to admit she could be just shopping."

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"She doesn't usually vanish in a puff of yellow smoke, does she?"

"No, she takes the Volkswagen. Max? You mean Joan's disappeared by magic?"

"Why not? You've been goading LJ into doing something. Apparently you've finally succeeded in briging him into action."

Ken said, "This isn't the sort of solution I expected."

Someone said Yoo hoo.

"Max, I think I heard something strange."

"Yoo hoo," called a woman's voice.

"Is that some magic phrase, Max?"

"Sounds more like yodeling." Max turned.

Coming from the front of the house was Aunt Jenny. She waved her Dodgers cap at them. "Did Val happen to stop by here?" she called.

"See," said Ken. "It's an open secret."

"Is he missing?" asked Max.

"I'm beginning to think so," said the old woman as she joined them. "He vanished in a cloud of ugly smoke. That isn't like Val at all."

"LJ again,' said Max.

"Beg pardon?"

"We'll tell Val you were asking after him," Max said. "I'm pretty sure he'll be back by this afternoon."

"Will there be any more smoke? We did settle out here to get away from the smog. If Val's going to take to coming and going in enormous gusts of smoke I don't think we'll have gained much."

"No more smoke," said Max, smiling and guiding Aunt Jenny around to the front of the house.

Ken followed. He waited until the old woman was into the hedges. Then he said, "Damn it. What's happening. Are Joan and Val shacked up in the fourth dimension someplace?"

"You can't get in without luggage," said Max. "Look, where did you find LJ?"

"That bastard. Here I butter him up for weeks and he does this." Ken hit his fist into his palm. "He washed in down at the beach a couple months ago. He seemed like an out of the ordinary sort of fish and I put him in the old pool. When it turned out he was probably magic I decided to get him to help out with Joan. I had to turn to somebody. With Joan having an affair."

"You should have tried Abigail Van Buren first," said Max. "And Joan isn't having an affair."

"What makes you say that?"

"I looked through some windows and peeked over some shrubs. She's ghosting Aunt Jenny pictures to make extra money."

"It could be I've screwed up some then."

"That's a possibility."

"I'll fix LJ, Max. I'll stand up to him and tell him to knock it off

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and tell me what's become of Joan." Ken stopped. "Max, she'll come back somehow, won't she?"

Max nodded. "She'll come back." He shook out a cigarette and lit it. "Did he talk like a Hollywood type when you found him?"

"No, that's only lately. In fact, he had some vague European accent when I found him."

"I think he's some kind of old world elemental spirit," said Max. "We have to have some weapon before we talk to him."

"A water spirit," said Ken. "I thought so, too. But none of the pictures in the reference books look like LJ."

"Maybe the guy who did the illustrations never saw one like LJ."

"That's right. Before television they went on hearsay a lot more than now."

"A spell to control a water elemental should work on LJ," said Max. "Even if he's only probably a second-string water spirit."

"There's a couple of good spells in one of the books."

"I know," said Max. "Let's see what we can work out."

They ran back into the house.

Ken looked over Max' shoulder into the kitchen sink. "We sprinkle him with that stuff and that's all?"

Max looked from the book of spells to the grey-green liquid in the sink. "According to this. It's not the top magic fluid, but it's the best we can do with household ingredients."

"How would a siphon be? A seltzer bottle to spray the junk at him with."

"You have one? I thought they only used those in comedies."

"That's where this one came from. A picture of my dad's." Ken went to the white doored cabinet at the kitchen end and felt inside. "That book is over three hundred years old. Suppose the spell is stale."

Max checked through the drawers and found a ladle and a funnel. "LJ is over three hundred years old, too. It should fit."

Ken put the bottle on the drain board and Max filled it with the fluid. "Don't spill any, Max."

"There's enough."

"I mean Joan'll get mad if we make a mess in her kitchen."

"There."

"If we get her back."

Max tightened the siphon on the bottle. "We should. Come on."

"Mr LJ's in conference, sweetie," said the voice at the end of the pool.

"Tell him to get his ass down here," said Ken.

"So is this how you talk to somebody who has solved your problems?" LJ swam to them and pulled himself up on the rock. "Who's the creep with you?"

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Max squatted and said, "What did you do with Joan McNamara?"

"Leave your card with my secretary, chum. You I don't even know."

"The bottle," said Max.

Ken brought it out from behind his back. "Ready."

"Bribes won't help you," said LJ. "Anyway I fixed up your problem swell for you, honey. This clown, Val Willsey, will never get his hands on your little lady now. Believe you me."

"Tell us what you did with them," said Max. "Or we'll use some of this anti-elemental spray on you."

"So who's an elemental?" LJ laughed. "Why are you boys so stewed up. I fixed things good. That's what you wanted."

"You didn't fix things good at all," said Ken. "You made the same stupid mistakes I did about Joan. It was Max here who . . ."

"Max, that's a nice name," said LJ. "If he noses around too much in my affairs I'll fix him, too. Him I'll cast as cupid with a dolphin if he don't watch it."

"We don't want to hurt you," said Max.

"So how could you?" LJ put his hands behind his scaly blue back and paced. Then he closed one eye and turned. Pointing at Max he said, "You I'll fix right now."

Ken sprayed the fluid at LJ. "Damn you."

"How typical," said LJ, toppling over. He fell and lay still with his legs up stiff in the air.

"It works," said Ken.

"Works great." Max watched LJ.

LJ popped and disintegrated into blue dust. "I had to use the stuff to save you, Max. It worked too good."

Max stood up, watching the spot where LJ had been. "In all the props and stuff that're stored here is there much statuary?"

"Sure," said Ken. "In the big warehouse back of here. All sorts of birdbaths and fountains and lawn statues. Greek stuff and so on." He put the bottle down. "Hey. And that's where a lot of my dad's old files and clippings and letters are stored."

"Could LJ get in there?"

"The pipes from here run back to the warehouse," said Ken. "That's probably where he picked up his Hollywood material."

"Let's take a look," said Max. "He threatened to turn me into a decorative piece for a fountain. Maybe he did the same with Joan."

Ken found her. "Hey, Max. Over here."

Joan and Val Willsey were on a pedestal, turned to stone. "Very funny," said Max.

"This used to be a satyr chasing a nymph."

"And never getting his hands

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on her," said Max. "LJ was a whimsical guy." Max looked at the rows of stone figures.

"It just occurred to me," said Ken. "I was so happy finding Joan I forgot. LJ's destroyed and Joan is turned to stone. How do we break this spell?"

Max walked once around the two figures and then leaned back against a stone Venus. "Try kissing her. That works sometimes."

"What about Val."

"Try Joan first."

Ken pulled a stool over and reached up. He leaned out and kissed the statue Joan. "Once enough?" he asked.

"Once enough for what?" said Joan, stepping down off the pedestal. "Ken, what's happened?" She glanced at the stone Val Willsey. "Is that Val?"

Ken hesitated. "Kiss him."

"The statue?"

"Go ahead."

Joan did. It brought Val back.

"What an odd thing to have happen over breakfast," he said. "Excuse me. Mother's probably having eight kinds of fit." He nodded at them and hurried away.

"I guess I misunderstood you," said Ken.

"Me, too, with you," said Joan.

Ken looked at Max. "I bet lots of people would be interested in that spray we made to use on LJ. There are probably other elementals around."

"LJ?" Joan asked.

"Tell you back at the house," Ken said, taking her hand. "Coming, Max?"

"In a minute. You go ahead."

"Thanks, Max," said Joan as she and Ken walked out of the warehouse.

Max lit a cigarette. He watched the stone Venus over his shoulder. Not a bad looking girl.

When he finished the cigarette Max walked down the row of statues and out into the daylight.

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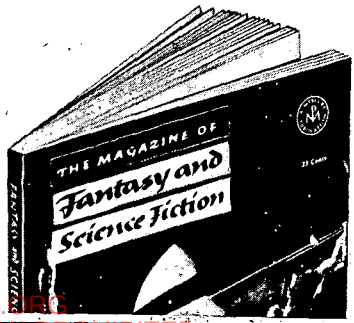

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